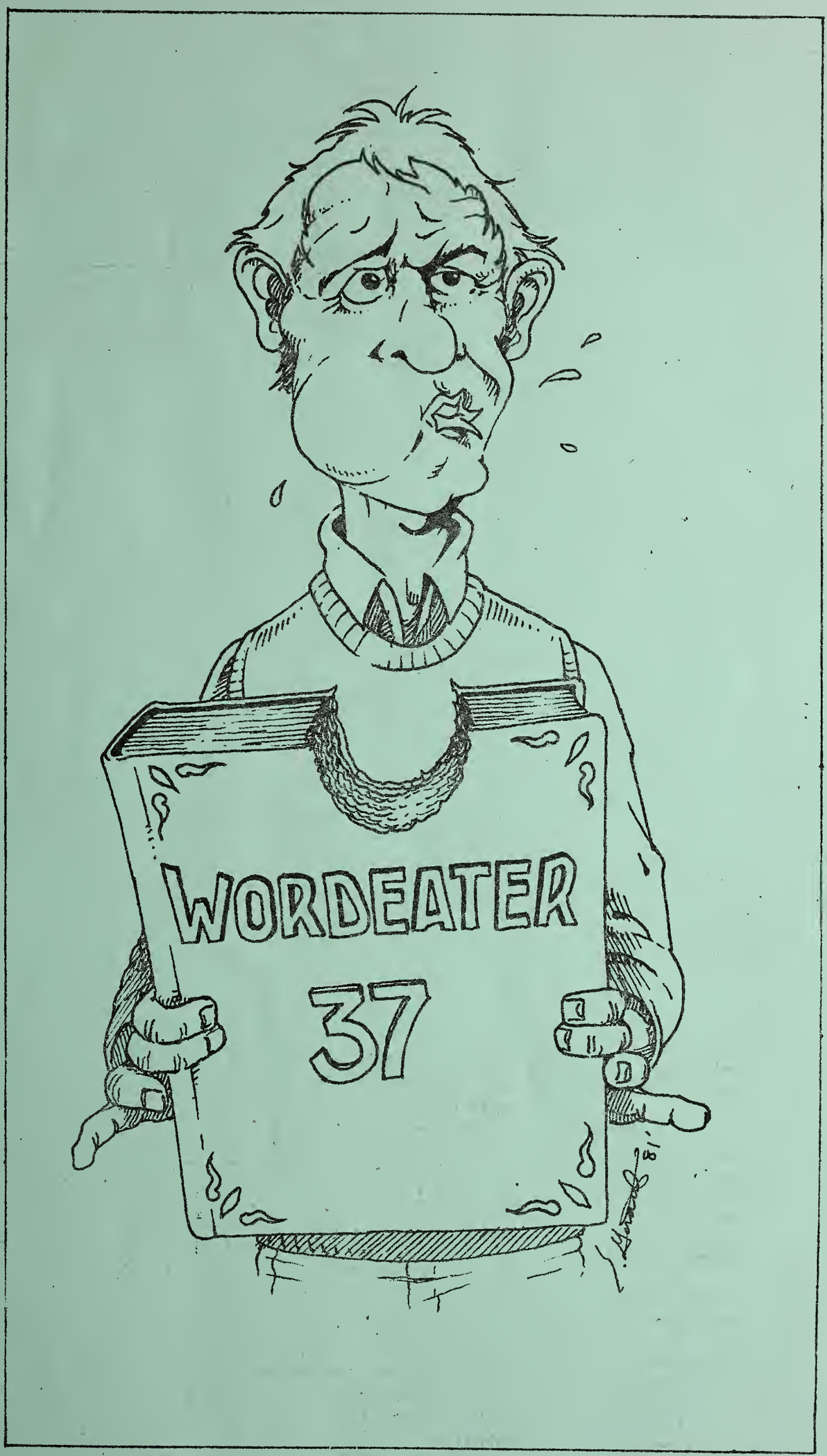
WORDEATER
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WORDEATER XXXVII STAFF:

Judy Belfield
Kristi Carsten
John D. Guse
Mark Hulfactor
Ernest McCabe
David Moore
John Stobart

For this issue, to get a submission accepted, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER Number 39 must be submitted to John Stobart in room C 1069 by February 26, 1982. The deadline for submissions for WORDEATER Number 38 will have passed by the time this issue is out (Nov. 23, 1981). Manuscripts will not be returned. They may be anonymous AND SHOULD BE TYPED.

WINNERS FOR THIS ISSUE:

Poetry

Michael A. Stillman $15
David Moore $5
R. Walser Yale $5

Prose

Len Overcash $15
David Moore $10

Cover Designs $20
Ed Girard

Future Deadlines:

WORDEATER 39 - February 26, 1982
40 - April 30, 1982

Thanks to all who helped collate.

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****

Geri Harder

SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

Spiders, snakes, rats, and lice,
Beetles, ticks, mosquitoes, and mice.
They slither, they swarm, they suck, they feed,
They burrow, they bite, they nest, they breed.

They spontaneously generated inside my head
And will eat me from inside out till I'm dead.

****

Judy Belfield

SEND ME SOME EARS

The ears are here
    after many a year
    of hiding and fear.
On horseback they come
    with hooves a-thrum,
    leaving behind the hill and the dale,
    the rill and the vale,
    and the nightingale.
They're here, they're here!
    to hear again
    the hopes of men,
        too long suppressed
        and put to rest
        by the silencing powers
        who passed their hours
        binding and gagging,
        boxing and bagging,
        til tongues went dumb
        and ears fell numb
        and trotted off to kingdom come.
But the ears are here
    after many a year --
    start up a cheer,
    send out for beer --
        the ears are here
        once more.

****

Judy Belfield

APPLE JELLY

Tap your fingers to your nose --
    the sap is flowing
    like liquid apple jelly.
This omniprecent sneezing
    travels like fleas on rats,
    and your eyes are like the river --
        green and dribbly.
Get your hot breath off my neck --
    take it back
    where it hacks and wheezes
    in the netherworlds of bronchi.
    Let it fight its way
    through pneumonia-causing blockages,
    and spill out in some other air
    not near mine.
Tap your nose with a two-ply spigot,
    and channel your infection
    into the nearest wastebasket,
        where it will sit for days
        on crusty kleenexes.
The pox be with you
    as it was in the beginning
    and ever shall be --
        world without mend.

Mike Stillman

BIKER

But
Then
Again,

You
Always
Were
A SAINT
On
Training
Wheels.

****

Karen Miller

I NOW HAVE A PET FLY

I now have a pet fly
Who is young and so spry
That I trained to be a clown.

If you pick up a swatter
He'll go hide while you totter
And come out after you put it down.

To show off his flair
When company is there
His acrobatics are now on stage.

He appears right on cue
Only to land in the stew
And bring my Mother-in-law out of her cage.

As we pick him from his blunder
We can't help but wonder
If he deposited anything in the pot.

He buzzes off with a smile.
Having eaten, meanwhile,
My company must leave on the trot.

And soon after I
Am thru training my fly
My horse will count with his legs.

And when I succeed
With that little deed
My chickens will lay boiled eggs.

****

Am I to perish from microbe invasion --
    tiny soldiers armed to the nucleus
    with fever-inducing weapons?
Not I,
    said the little red nose --
    my apple jelly's still congealed,
    and the parafin's still uncracked.

****

Ernest McCabe

COME ON OVER TO MY HOUSE

The light fixture turns to a U. F. and O.
The carpet jumps up and bites my big toe.
The statue of Santa Claus chuckles with glee,
And our cat, no a tiger, is chewing on me.
The curtains they turn into pythons. You see?

The rats and the spiders jump off of the wall,
And that elephant there is the worst of them all.
Is all of this stuff really happening to me?
Well, hop in your car, drive over and see.

****

Karen Miller

MY SEX IS MY HEX

My Mother-in-law's house
  is clean for her spouse
No dust, not even a speck.

So my hubby will complain
  about our lived-in domain
Gee, does he love to hen peck.

He doesn't know that the hitch
  is that Mother-in-law's a bithh
And that's how she stays ahead.

No ant with a brain,
  no filth's that insane
Near her no dirt dares to tread.

There's a definite characteristic
  in my husband -- he's chauvinistic
With demands like Ebeneezer would make.

There's no union to back me
  just hard work to crack me
And these long hours make my head ache.

What hubby doesn't see
  are the fun jobs for me
That I'd turn over to him in a sec.

Things he takes for granted
  proves his opinion is slanted.
It's making his poor wife a wreck.

While he listens to rock & roll
  my head's in the toilet bowl
Since the Tidy-Bowl man is a flake.

With dish pan hands
  I clean the garbage cans
That would make my pet maggot puke.

For these revolting little chores
  I get no pay -- only sores
The glamour of marriage really fades.

The unbalance of the sexes
  for women what the hex is
You become a jack-of-all-trades.

****

Maureen Mueller

MY PLACE

This is my place,
Where I can reveal
the truths in my heart . . .
and no one hears.
Before the night has
swept the sky,
I come here,
face to face
with the real me.
This is my place.

This is my place,
where no restraints
are put upon me.
In peace,
my mind can gather answers
that no one else
will give.
Alone . . .
This is my place.

****

R. Walser Yale

SMOKING HASH

Golden, heady pollen
Toked through handcarved
Indian Rosewood or brilliant
Brass or onyx networks

Sweet, pungent, burning
familiar heat
A knife in the chest
Melting throat and
Pounding heart

Breath held deep
It forces its way out
In tremendous
Racking convulsions --

Six times as potent
As the bud,
It's a concentrated high.

And as the aromatic
Languid veils
Of opacity clear --

You realize
You are stoned.

****

Melissa Wessell

DEMONS AND SWEET FORGIVENESS

On U. S. Highway 60, Arizona:

The clouds look beautiful, smoke lifting from the sides of bushed hills. Driving into a cloud on a cold day in February. Don your winter coat again, Archie we have passed from the desert into a rain forest and now into the clouds. And perhaps before the hour is up, we will set our feet onto the first snows of our winter. Out of the clouds and on toward a memory-town. Memory town where we laughed and cried and played; built fires and baked beans. The air is sharp and clear like a fantastic dream.

Day to day my life spreads out like an undulating amoeba in a bowl of red jelly, like the color of hills after time has worn them slowly changing with centennial mutations. I fell in love with the house and the embodiment of my dreams. Now the car is moving, the clouds are moving, and my dreams are turning as a leaf in the wind, upside down and spinning.

I want to find a dream that I can snap on top of my head like an acorn cap, so it would always be the same and I would always be able to think, this is my dream, this is my dream. That dream house is the first house in all my days that I loved, I really loved, and I thought: I want to live here, I want to walk down this steep winding sidewalk to this mailbox and I want to look out this window every morning, sit at a desk here with my friend, my typewriter up on top of this hill overlooking city lights, winding streets, cars driving by like tiny visions in children's books.

how deep are your dreams?
how deep and how
secretly hidden
beneath miles and miles
and years and years
of forbidden hopes.

It's a dusty highway to travel on
inside yourself
searching for memories
forgotten dreams.
You've got to find them,
grasp their dusty tails,
and bring them back to the light.
Four days of the fog /then/
a day in the sun.
Ladders, railings, ledges,
Sometimes a thump really knocks you
down.
But the more you learn,
the more you can steer
your own sailboat.

*

REPRISE:

The Proud Lummox stands straight and tall; his hairs glisten in the falling snow and I stop, wondering why it is the snows and not the falling leaves that bring him to this stature.

but that the days have been changing moment by moment and the sun turns windy turns snowy now today and the ground is becoming white-flecked with tire tracks.

The trees stand with open arms where are the birds and there was a cricket inside my kitchen this morning, driven in by the ice on his windshield. I look out the window and I see snow falling, flakes flying and glistening, and the weeds shudder. Does the wind forget that there was Spring yesterday, that there were tiny leaves popping up in delicate surprise? The sky is gray and confused with this passing of seasons. One today, another tomorrow, and all of them turning, turning, slowly becoming different every day. So I will become the winter today, if that is my challenge. I will become the Proud Lummox firmly standing with hooves placed in geometric planes.

****

Cathie Durkee

MYSTERY

More than once the eagel screamed
across the crystal sky.
More than once the monarch soared
across the endless breeze.
More than once my soul leaped
but was earth bound.

Be still you searcher
do not protest.
Earth's illusion is but a speck.
Do not desire
For you'll know less
in a while.

The tears careen across the face.
Life's dreams are recalled.
The beat of the heart is not true.
It isn't that simple,
For pain will last until
The very end.

****

Melissa Wessell

MY MIND MOVES FASTER

My mind moves faster than the eye.
when it comes to emotions, that is.
Snuggling down into sensations,
then defensively standing so upright again.
All the ups and downs keep me
alert for good measure.
Spiralling back and forth,
I call out your name in a dream.

****

David Moore

RUMBLINGS ALONG THE FRINGE

We who rule the megaphonic vanguard
Shall not be wounded by wordless deeds
And faceless fiends. Nor would we be fooled
By blank and gibbering facades and ruses
Instinctively projected to hide the fact that
Your souls are as empty as bloodless turnpikes
Where the black limosines of the stereotype God
No longer roam in search of programmable flocks.

Oh stare at the wayfarers who are sprawled
In a ditch by the side of Life's road.
We are not alone.
But of all those coreless masses of defense mechanisms
Only we have the strength to rudely cry out.
But fear not
We slowly sink into the soft and fleshy swamps
Bubbling with the sorrows of dead and dying souls.
Our emotional underbellies glittering whitely in the sunlight
Ready for gory guttings
As we gently float
Capsized and limply leaking.

Here lies Hope
Yes, Hope is a liar

****

Cathie Durkee

EXISTING

Why can't I find the words
To explain my recent fate?
I have ranted and raved.
The tears do not wash away the pain.

I am stuck in this place
Where my soul feels cold
As if death's angel had visited.
Am I dead or alive?

****

Judy Belfield

I HEAR A CLOUD DESCENDING

I hear a cloud descending,
    its grayness crashing in my silence
    like a head-on collision
        in the countryside at night.
I feel a cloud hovering over my head,
    its center composed of harpstrings,
    too tautly pulled,
    ready to spring haywire in my hair
    and whip my face,
        cutting long, thin bloodthreads in my skin.
The cloud at my shoulder
    roars deceptions in my ear,
    like the villain in a melodrama.
But, yes --
    this <u>is</u> a melodrama,
    sprung forth from my imagination
    by a masochistic trigger called "creative destruction,"
    which is, after all,
    not very creative
        or destructive,
    but only a minor disturbance
        generated in my mind
        and blown out of proportion
            for the moment.

****

David Moore

THE ENDLESSNESS

Have you seen the timeless seekers
Twisting the eons into wicked spheres
That constantly swirl 'round a center
They don't even know exists.
They warp and wrap last week's millenia
Into a seemingly endless cycle
That vibrates with awful agony
Cramped and confused
Grasping for the terminal line

When all is ignorantly curved
All topsy-turvy and in a flux
That hides the sameness.
"Four dimensions have we
and many more that you can't see.
Infinite time to be free
When you drift the mindless sea."

****

Judy Belfield

FULL-MOON SATURDAYNIGHT BLUES

Big ol' peachy-colored, Saturdaynight moon
set up high
in a royally blueblack sky
makes me start to thinkin
of winken and blinken
and moon-shaped glasses without any rims
perched on a nose so long and so thin --
"So long, nasal-voiced songster
whining a Mr. Moonlight tune."
Those liquid beams get drippy
and soak into my soul
on this otherwise
dry, sighing, dying night.
I listen to the soundwaves crackle
through my triple-speakered car radio,
vibrating that "Hey Jude" melody --
"take a sad song and make it
better . . ."
while my heart gets wetter
from star-tears seeping
through the dark glassly.
A hooded stranger points a bony finger
that lingers in a stop-frame gesture,
and a ghostly chill speaks in the wind
of crossing rivers
in drizzly depths of despair.
Yet, the pears -- yellow, sweet and juicy,
rest in a basket on a bastard's knee
and I can't see the simile
touted before me
like grapes to the fox.
Don't worry baby,
everything'll turn out sour,
I tell myself --
there aint no lower
I can go,
so I'll sit and pitch my woe
to all who'll listen and soon forget,
but it don't matter anyhow.
It's only the moon --
big ol' peachy-colored,
Saturdaynight moon --
that makes me feel as royally blue
as I do.

****

Judy Belfield

SUCKERS ALSO DIE

Circus ladies
In satin suits
Patterned with a thousand diamonds
Climb the ropes
And stand on platforms
High above the crowds,
Twinkling in the spotlights
Like fairy princesses in storybooks.
They sparkle and glitter
Like their smiles.
They are stars shining in our midst --
Heavenly things
Come to rest within our three-ring vision.

Why is it
My eye lingered too long
On the wrinkles
Under the thick, face paint,
The grease on the silky costumes,
The filth at the hems,
And the dirt, dirt, dirt,
When all I really wanted,
Was to believe!

****

R. Walser Yale

BOHEMIAN POETRY

As I page through
A Wordeater --
I can see
How many people
Think like me

But feel sudden
Inferiority
When I pore over
Bohemian Poetry.

Now writing too fast --
I stop
That incessant echo!

So what then
Separates it from
Plain recorded thought?

Well, for me
It comes
In
Flashes
Fast and
Hot

As the chaos subsides
I try desperately to respond
To all the ideas
Flying around my cranium

Then encoding these ideas
I set the word upon the page.

****

Judy Belfield

MY THOUGHTS TONIGHT

My thoughts tonight
are like the mobs that crowd the subways
in an August afternoon rush hour.
Like bodies pushing, shoving, being squeezed, compressed,
teeming, seething in underground tunnels too small for containment,
yet somehow managing to accommodate,
my brain if full of unfinished statements and parts of phrases
jumbled together incoherently.
This massed confusion,
like throngs in a new Babylon tower,
stretched out lengthwise under the streets,
steams and sweats in its electric-lit cavern,
where individuals are not complete --
only parts of a whole,
yet there are some,
seen for mere seconds and noted.
One gesticulates wildly,
waving his arms in heated conversation,
beads of saltwater dribbling down his face,
down his grimy, city neck,
crusted outlines ringing damp crescents
on his jacket-forsaken dress shirt.
Another sits limply on a bench
like a ragdoll left out in the rain,
her droopy, listless limbs
hanging haphazardly from her torso.
Here, a sparkling, goldenstockinged one
in scarlet spike-heeled shoes
and black satin thighslit dress, shouts out,
"look at me, look at me,"
but there is nothing beneath the frippery
but more gaudy emptiness.
There, a gray-garbed man
with wrinkles in his skin
to match the number of minutes in his life,
tries to melt into the walls
as he gasps for air in the oppressive humidity.
Unfinished portraits in the mob
wait patiently for the train,
no more important than the rest,
except that they were remembered,
and I sense an insurrection simmering.

****

David Moore

RATHER DESOLATE
(NO FISHING -- REPRISE)

Empty beaches in the sun
Where the people have no fun

Cloudless sky
Winds blow high
Through the air
Where no birds fly

Crashing waves
Along the shore
Flooding the graves
Of faded slaves

Dead fish bodies
In the sands
Mingling blood
With forgotten lands

And out in the ocean
That dreadful deep
Where nothing dies
They only sleep

****

Melissa Wessell

UNSUNG SONG IN THE MIDDLE OF A TAILSPIN

I

Looking sparkling
and under a spell
caught in all over and
stuck in the game.

II

Feeling better, then worse, then tossed in a
corner and singing the words to some
old song; babe, it's a heck of a life.

Drowning and achey, then tossed in a
sling, and then for a spell getting
smiling again; oh babe, it's a heck of a life.

Every road that I take it's got
too many turns, every rule
that I break it's got too many
burns; babe, it's a heck of a life.

III

My feelings are fried
and I'm weary and beat.
Wanna close myself off now
and turn myself down.
Don't you step on my
tracks, you dirty no-good
cold-headed clam.
Your hands may be pure
but your soul is so black,
and black hearts bleed pale prices.

****

Cathie Durkee

EMPTINESS

What is this coldness
A not met place
Of steel, gray and black

What makes it lodge
Upon the chest
Stuck like peanut butter

What could this be
Not caring, not feeling
Emptiness at its ultimate

There has to be a reason
The velvet is gone
Softness, gentleness lost

Life can not exist like this
Death's silence there
Not a feeling remains

****

Judy Belfield

I SLEPT IN THE SOLITARY PURPLE

I slept in the solitary purple,
    where I was blind and deaf
    and could not speak.
I had naught but nakedness
    and could not fight the expulsion
        that ripped me from contentedness,
    and so, I was given death,
    which is called, "life".
My face glowed red
    as I watched the evening sun
    splatter the horizon with blood.
I felt warmth draining from my veins,
    being replaced with something cold
    and sweatbeads stopped on my forehead,
    turning to ice with the chill.
I waited for the night,
    as a chimney sweep cried on a rooftop,
        lone and unappreciated,
    and a thousand sunsets crept into my heart,
    armed with weapons for the slaughter.
There was no turning back,
    nor any escape on the forward path.
I was pierced with spears,
        the wounds screaming as my soul gushed forth
        and festering pus knitted the gaping gashes together.
I am whole again,
    I breathe without obstruction,
    I think, see, create,
        but also feel --
        and remember.
Would that these vivid recollections
    become as scrub-mopped floors,
    swabbed in all the forgotten corners,
    and replaced with
    an antiseptic fragrance --
        the perfume
        of misbegotten memories.

****

Georgia L. Schmidt

THE SEASONS OF OUR EMOTIONS

Emotions are like the changing
of the seasons.
They can be warm,
bright and carefree like the summer, having no
obligations or commitments.

They can be very colorful
like autumn, and have a crisp spicy
twist of indifference.

Then like atutumn one can
be caught off guard by a sudden chill
followed by the death of nature and its beauty.

Then the winter follows cold,
distant and isolated. Yet, there is that
unexplainable peace during the winter months.

Like a love that dies,
away in the fall, one is comforted by a
blanket of snow to regenerate one's
feelings and emotions.
Then after this period
of blissful isolation, we can be like
the spring, and start fresh and anew.

Granted, the rains will fall, and the winds
will blow. But, this will only help us to dig
our roots down deeper, and we will grow
stronger and healthier.

We will then discover that we
are alive in our feelings;
That our personality will
be inviting like the green of the leaves.
That our attitude will
be fresh and fragrant like the beautiful
spring flowers.

We will also find that
we have a quiet free-spirited conscience,
like that of a butterfly or dove.

We will then be attributed with an
eagerness to reproduce the beauty of nature.

And then, once again
life goes on like the changing of
the seasons.

****

Ernest McCabe

LOVE AND RED INK

The blood red of my pen strikes the
wall and bounces off onto the carpet. My
wife walks in and screams bloody murder.
I reply, "It's only red ink dear." She
does not hear and goes on screaming vio-
lently. I pick up a steak knife and her.
"There, that's what real blood looks like.
OK?? Stop your bloody screaming will you?"
I slam the door and head downtown to buy
another red Bic.
P.S. This message brought to
you courtesy of a red
Bic.

****

Bob Frederick

OUR VICTIM

You knew from the beginning
that life would treat you fine
flirt around with every boy
and drink a little wine

Oh yes, how you loved to play
you knew you could not miss
to be the one with lots of dates
you only had to kiss

Popular you did become
but kissing was a bore
boys said that to date again
you had to do some more

You swore your full allegiance
to booze, drugs, rock-n-roll
so you let them squeeze your breast
so you could smoke a bowl

Parties come and parties go
with joints and euchre decks
upstairs at such a party
was where you first tried sex

After that on any night
from boys you'd get a call
asking if you would come out
so with you they could ball

We all took our turns with you
and though I've never said
now that I remember it
you weren't that good in bed

Your mattress was our castle
and on it, we were king
because there, at our request
you would do anything

After many months of this
at last you came to feel
that you were the one who was
messed over in the deal

Then one night it happened
no farther would you go
the prick beside you could not
believe that you said NO

He still took what he wanted
he took it all by force
and so you learned the terror
of held down intercourse

After your violation
you never were the same
for now you bore the burden
of earned and unearned shame

But look back at your life Babe
I'm sure that you will find
before he raped your body
we all had raped your mind.

Judy Belfield

THERE ARE ONLY TRAGEDIES AND ECSTASIES

There are only tragedies and ecstasies
as time passes
and my life dies by the clock.
All the rest is forgotten
in a blur of sameness.
So sadly they homogenize,
the days not made distinct by some specific event.
So poignantly unparticular,
the lazing afternoons
that melt yellow into yellow --
when nothing seems to change but the date.
They slip by unnoticed
like rapidly-flipping calendar pages
in an old movie.
Could I but remember
one unspecial day,
would I return to relive it?
No.
Even though Emily Webb chose one
by Mr. Wilder's whim,
I would not,
for I thrive in my extremes
and drown in similarities --
but I hear there are some
content with patterns and predictability,
who flow through their everydays
with peace in their souls,
expecting nothing more than the day before,
and I envy them --
but would not trade places
were it possible.

****

Melissa Wessell

I CLIMBED INSIDE THE CORRIDORS . . .

I climbed inside the corridors searching for directionality. Treading too cautious to make any mistakes, and bound and fettered in gravelike escape. And twisting and turning under turrets and avenues I avoided blunders. Too late to laugh and too early to listen. That was a while ago.

Then in September I hurt you and I didn't mean to smart. Didn't mean to be so dumb and see your eyes so redly unveiled. Don't want to think of your gentle heart hurting, but I see your wounds and I am shy in my sorrow.

It will take time to mend the strings I broke. Time and showing you over again, I value your love, I value your heart. And I heard your words spoken out clearly: hurt between words behind eyes beside sentences. Hurt. And can I make it up to you? Will you forgive?

You just can't have as much fun as you want to: you just can't have all that much fun. If it isn't the censor bureau (your own or someone else's), it's disappointments and deflated imaginings. And time spread out so languorously I barely heard the difference. Look at your laughter, now look at your love; look at sweet round faces blooming beside you. What you lack in depth you may win in surprise.

****

Judy Belfield

WHEN YOU SMILE

When you smile
your eyes twinkle,
your mouth shows a wrinkle
or two
and you are tantalizingly seductive
without even trying.
When I talk to you,
I want to make you laugh and laugh,
because when you laugh,
your smile is so alive,
I can't get enough,
and I could die of an overdose
without even caring.
When you don't smile,
you're so unsingular.
Your face is dull,
you seem dead,
and I could pass you in a crowd
without even noticing.

Michael A. Stillman

FLICK

When the wind came
And when we were running with the weather
When your mind changed
In the shady depth set adrift
A stripe flickered golden
Swallowed by changing skies
Floated in Autumn rivers
When the night came
You held my breath and my heart slowed
And you got up and walked away.

****

Judy Belfield

I REMEMBER

I remember
stretch pants with snap-off straps
and ski sweaters that matched exactly,
ratting my hair
and spraying it hard
so the wind didn't have a chance,
lining my eyes with black,
and coloring my lips with a pink
that was so light,
it was almost white,
but not quite.
I wore Chanel Number Five,
which I bought regularly
with the earnings I made
at my dollar-an-hour, part-time, sign-writing job,
and on frosty, fall Fridays,
after dinner,
just as it was beginning to get dark,
I put my sixteen-year-old self together
for you.
You were new then --
a scrub-faced stranger
with slick-backed, black hair
that puffed in a pompadour
just like Phil Everly's,
and I didn't yet speak to you any haphazard thoughts,
but chose words carefully,
while trying to bee
Miss Personality
of 1963.
I remember
football games
in the cold, crisp, floodlit stadium,
our breaths making puffs in the air,
and hot chocolate too hot to drink,
that was more water than chocolate,
and the taste of Salem cigarettes --
another new habit I'd acquired.
We were new then --
we said "please" and "thank you,"
and "excuse me,"
hid some things to make our "good" look better,
and struggled to make clumsy kisses
seem practiced and perfect,
but not too.
I wouldn't have said it was love,
but something was there --
and whatever it was,
I can still feel it
on cool autumn mornings.

****

Cathie Durkee

ANDY WAS VERY MUCH IN LOVE

Andy was very much in love. He had asked Sue to marry him several times, but she refused. It was spring time and once again Andy proposed to Sue. "I'll marry you, but only under one condition," Sue said. Andy would have agreed to anything.

"That you give me a sleeve job after we're married," Sue explained.

Andy was ecstatic. He made the promise, took her out to buy a ring and celebrate. Afterwards, he floated home dreaming of their future together. He drove his car into the driveway of his home, and was about to alight when it dawned on him. He didn't know what a sleeve job was. The thought only bothered him for a moment. "I know, I'll ask my Dad," he said to no one. "He told me the facts of life. I'm sure he'll tell me what a sleeve job is."

The next morning when Andy came downstairs for breakfast his father was sitting in the front room reading the paper. "Ah, Dad. Sue has accepted my proposal, however, I need you to answer a question for me."

"Congratulations, Andy. Sure I'll answer any questions you might have." Andy's father was very relieved that Andy was finally going to settle down.

Andy smiled shyly. "Could you tell me what a sleeve job is?"

His father threw down the newspaper, jumped up from the chair, back handed him across the face and said, "Don't you ever talk that way in this house again, or I'll disinherit you." And he stormed out of the room.

Andy was upset by this scene. He ran from the house, got into his car and drove around for awhile. Then he thought about his older brother Pete. If anyone knew the answer to this question, Pete would. He pulled into a parking spot near his brother's apartment and used his key to open the door.

(continued)

Andy Was Very Much In Love, continued

Pete was dressing when Andy walked in. Once again he told of his upcoming marriage and then explained, "The only problem is she wants me to give her a sleeve job when we're married, but I don't know what a sleeve job is."

He no sooner got the words out of his mouth when Pete grabbed him by the shirt, threw him against the wall, and slugged him in the mouth.

"Get out of here, and don't you ever come back again." Pete pushed him out the door and slammed it in his face.

Dejectedly, Andy walked to his car. He looked up at the window of Pete's apartment, shook his head, and got in. He wiped the blood from his mouth and drove to Sue's house. He was about four blocks away when he happened to see Dave and some of their friends outside of Dave's house working on a car. Andy pulled into the driveway.

"Dave's been around. Maybe he or one of the other guys know the answer," he thought as he got out of the car. He walked up the driveway and was hailed by his friends. They had all attended school together and knew each other well. Andy told them of the engagement and a beer was presented into his hand. They made plans for a fun-filled bachelors' party when Andy spoke up.

"Listen, I have one problem." The guys gathered around. "Sue wants me to give her a sleeve job after we're married." Luckily, Andy was fast on his feet. One person grabbed a tire iron, another a crow bar, and the third a set of chains, and were in hot pursuit. They managed to put a few dents in Andy's new Chevy before he peeled out of the driveway.

Andy was more confused than ever. "What's all this about," he asked himself. He started to drive towards Sue's again when it dawned on him. "If I marry her, she'll have to tell me what a sleeve job is."

Several weeks later, Andy and Sue were married. After the reception, they went to a hotel in a nearby town. Andy was changing his clothes in the bedroom in anticipation of what was to come.

In the meantime, Sue was in the bathroom ready to take a bath. She stepped into the bath tub, slipped, fell, and hit her head on the side.

On the way to the hospital, she died.

****

Bob Frederick

LINDA

How many times
have I done my thinking
with my crotch?
And told the same old lies?

How many times
have I faced the morning
all alone
beneath the cold white sun?

How many times
have I done it again
without doubt
that life held more than this?

How many times
must I drink myself sick
in penance
for sins I cannot name?

How many times
will the thought of you (BITCH)
fill me with
the hate of undead love?

It seems strange
months and lovers later
I still find
it's to your ghost I speak.

****

Melissa Wessell

HE LOVED HER MORE . . .

He
loved her
more than he'd
loved any woman.
She would moan and
cry so sweetly, yet
she'd never say a
word. There was
no bitching from
this mamma -- only
the trembles from
her sweet vibrations.
He picked her up and
held her gently in his arms.
It was as if her weight were
an extension of his limbs and
when he touched her their edges
fused. His fingers danced gracefully
along her strings.
I couldn't see his hands move
from one place to another but
watched them arch along her neck
in cadences of rapid succession.
His hands moved up and down her
curves and she sang him songs
so sweet and fine.
She was his love, true and pure.
No cheating heart or wandering
eyes. His beautiful goddess, and he
loved her more than he loved
any other woman.

****

David N. Warren

A STORIE

You untamed bitch,
You always think you can hitch,
On a shadow of another,
After this one just left.

Are you trughful
On the ways you tell a story,
Or do your lines
Just start a storie for us all?
Do you slip back
When you feel you're falling,
When a troubled day
Starts falling on you?

Storyteller, you're always on the run.
Storyteller, where you started
You should not have begun.
Storyteller, you don't tell it
In rhythm or rhyme.
Storyteller, they caught you this time.

You always seem to live
On that same old game,
Adding more everyday,
Thinkin' people believe and rely on you.
Well maybe one day
You will see who's the fool.
You seem to make life
Seem just like a play,
Adding what you want,
And what you don't, you take away.

Do you wonder why
They smirk in your face,
Laugh behind your back,
And crack jokes everyday?
Oh, why do they call you names?

Storyteller, you're always on the run.
Storyteller, where you started
You should not have begun.
Storyteller, you don't tell it
In rhythm or rhyme.
Storyteller they caught you this time.

****

Judy Belfield

TWO BRICKS

Two bricks
slapped together with mortar
in the middle of a wall,
in the middle of the all,
never moving,
yet changing color with age,
taking on dispositions
and character
through the seasons' turnings
one into the other.
As the years pass,
and the weather beats their faces,
taking away forever
the vestiges of newness,
it smooths out their rough
exteriors
but ah!
the mortar also crumbles
little by little,
and one wonders
what holds them together --
what indeed!
Yet the time dissolves
into memories --
some sweet, some bitter --
and there is always
another day
and another,
awaiting renovation
or the wrecking ball.

****

Michael A. Stillman

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

A battle-worn sword
Is all that time has kept
To tell of a life.

Lay the blade near your heart
And it will tell you a tale
Of a day when a knight
Would put his life to the test
For honour
And a man would ask God
To decide what was right
And wrong.

History can't recall his name
But we call him sir.
He defended the crown
And came home to his lady
With a golden brow.
Where is he now?

Yet his lady lives on
In the heart of a maiden
Living her twentieth spring
On butterfly wings.

I look in her eyes
Knowing I carried our crest
In a battle
She doesn't remember.
When I whisper of our life
I hear the horn's echo,
Calling the brave to fight.
We unfurl the silk banner
And defend what's right.

Our king is in front
On a steed shining and white
Like the foam on the brook
Or the look in his eye.

(continued)

Sunday Afternoon, continued

He's been awake all night
Preparing for dawn
A gaunt face drawn and weary
But a heart that fights on.

The enemy surrounds us now
And our forces are few.
When I draw my last breath,
It will be for my king
And my Lady.

She touches my arm.
"Where were you?"
I was lost in her eyes;
a reverie of colour
golden and green
that expanded and burst
like a bubbling dream.

But where am I now?

****

Karyn Skaggs

THE LAKE

I tried to walk across the frozen lake
And just as the ice started to crack
A hand came from the darkness
and saved me.
Then the sun came and melted the ice
and darkness --
I knew I had found <u>something</u>
but what?
Was this an endless love?
Seasons changed and so did we
I tried to preserve the warmth
but your leaves fell farther from me.
You fell on fresh greener grass,
I had lost the warmth.
I stand on the lake again and try
to walk.
The ice is cracking again -- I fall into
darkness
No one is there. I sink into the cold.
I wonder where your warmth is now.
Will the sun ever shine again?

****

Judy Belfield

TALK TO ME

Talk to me --
even in a daydream
or a passing thought;
cause I'm feeling so desperate today
and I'm building
a dangerous dividing wall
between me and the world,
putting up the bricks one at a time
too quickly.
Talk to me.
Say me something of you
and I will grab it
like a starving beggar
and cram it in my mouth.
Without regard to Emily Post,
I will let its juices stain my chin,
for I can taste your voice,
and it is the exquisite
sweetsour candy that I crave.
Talk to me.
I don't care what you say
or how you say it --
only that you do;
it will make the next minute
less fearful
and less alone.

****

Michael A. Stillman

DEAR ROSE

Dear Rose,

I've been thinking about our relationship. Obviously, there's no way we can salvage it now, but I'll always remember our days together, and the mammaries I'll leave behind. Remember when we first met? I asked about the message on your t-shirt, and you said that it was in braille. I thought that you were fibbing until later, after I nibbled on your earlobes and cut my lips on those Eiffel Tower earrings. The first time I called you on the phone, you said that I gave you good vibrations. What was that whirring noise in the background? A couple of months later my heart was touched when you reached out and called me on vacation, all the way from Florida. My wallet was touched when you reversed the charges.

Remember when you invited me over for some "hot frenching"? I was surprised to find out that you meant a gourmet dinner.

Catered.

On me.

(Continued)

Dear Rose, continued

You were always such a crene.
Later I turned out the light, we kissed, and I tingled all over. Then I realized that I still had my finger in the socket. You said that you had a soft tongue, but you never mentioned those hard teeth. The next morning I asked if you were on the pill and you said, "Oh no, I get a balanced diet."

Perhaps the last straw was when you had the nerve to call and ask me to pick up some douche on the way over. I asked what kind, and you said, "industrial strength."

When I told you that I was leaving, and you cried all those crocodile tears (to match your complexion, I guess), I wondered why did I tolerate you for so long. I guess I might have a serious masochistic streak in me

The sexiest thing that you could do would be to turn your back on me.

Farewell,

Carlos

P. S. Yes, I still have your toothbrush.

****

Jddy Belfield

ADRIANE'S SUNSINGER

He stands bronzegolden,
waiting for Apollo's chariot
to race across the sky
and herald the coming of day.
He, a tempered Phoebus,
a god cast in metal,
fashioned by hands
skilled in the turns
and curves of sinew,
bears himself with pride
on thick, steely legs --
a motionless sentinel
regarding the horizon
for the first signs of light,
watching tirelessly
for the daystar
through manmade eyes,
so that he might give voice
to a silent serenade.

I will sing your song for you
and all will hear,
and know the sun is nigh
by the resonance of passion
that escapes my lungs
and bursts forth over the fields,
echoing through the tall grasses,
and beyond,
unto the ends of the sea.
I will be your ladylove --
the one you will not need or heed
when I brush your slowly warming thigh
with a soft, sudden kiss.

****

Michael A. Stillman

INSPIRATION

Inspiration
Take my trembling hand
Walk me through this land
Let the sun shine on my face
Give me answers to embrace
And a bright-eyed maiden
Like you.

Bloodbeats pounding through my head
A thousand marching boots atread
The fickle wheel of fortune clicks
again
The empty eyes of many watch it spin
Her bandana torn
A vow unsworn
In the lady's eyes you see your name
The fallout of your dreams
ablaze in flame
Ideals grow older
Horizons smolder
Don't use the die
but keep on with the game

****

Karen Miller

SERGEANT BROOKS

Sgt. F. Brooks
Homicide
Wilton Police Station
Wilton

Dear Sgt. Brooks:

I am sorry that I'm writing to you rather than coming to see you in person, but I am afraid. Police stations scare me and the police aska lot of questions, but never seem to let you answer them. I am afraid you would not let me tell you everything that happened -- that you would not hear me out. I did not meanfor things to happen the way they did. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in jail.

I rented the townhouse at 1313 Grossmoor because it was cheap. I didn't make a lot of money at the small office where I worked. I needed a place to live because I left my husband. I had to leave him. I couldn't take any more. When I married Jim -- this was Jim's second marriage, -- I was the happiest girl around. How could anything that started out so beautiful nd up so rotten? It wasn't always that way, Sgt. Brooks. Before we got married, Jim was the kindest, most polite person a girl could ever hope to meet. He escorted me to nice restaurants, ran to open doors for me, bought me roses. And when we drove anywhere, Jim would always say, "Come sit next to me. I can't bear to be apart from you -- not even here in the car." He was so sweet and gentle and loving.

Sgt. Brooks, how could I have been so naive? I was worse than naive, I was downright blinded. I should have seen warning signs, there must have been something that would have given me a clue to what was to come. Actually, thinking back, the first clue came on our wedding day. We were leaving to go on a weekend honeymoon, and when I got into the car, I slid over to sit next to Jim just as he always insisted I do. But, when I did, he shoved me away! He actually pushed me so hard that I slid back across the seat right into the door and hurt my arm. "Get away from me," he said, "Do you always have to be sitting on top of me?" I was shocked and hurt, but I told myself that he was just nervous because of the excitement of the wedding and all. But, deep down in my heart I knew something was wrong, Sgt. Brooks. If there is love between two people, that is not a natural reaction toward closeness.

And later that night, when he suggested a few grotesque alternatives to our simple, gentle lovemaking, I got sick to my stomach. At that time, I thought it was just that he had had too much to drink at our reception, since that was the first time I had seen him drinking booze since I met him. I was able to talk him out of those ideas he had that night, but as the months rolled by, he became more and more insistent and forceful in his perversions, especially as he began drinking more and more. It wasn't until months later that his mother finally told me that he was an alcoholic. He was "on the wagon" at her insistence at the time I met him. She had felt that he could have a better chance of "finding a nice girl and settling down again" if he staved away from the alcohol. But, alcohol was in his blood, and the more he drank, the more violent he became. He began breaking things in the house, and throwing things. And when he was mad at me, he would beat me -- hitting me on the head mostly, and kicking or hitting me on the knees with a stick. "Call the police," he used to say, "and tell them I gave you that bruise on your knee. You can't prove it. They'll laugh in your face!" If I had known then that he still could be arrested for beating, maybe I would have called, but I believed him that they would laugh at me. I felt I was trapped. So I continued to live with him and to go to work every day, for he insisted I work. I had to work to pay the bills because his paycheck went for booze. He even kept a bottle under his pillow. And I continued to slave around the house, for Jim was very demanding about housekeeping. There were many nights I had to go without sleep in order to keep up with the cooking and cleaning and laundry and going to work every day. And when I was sick, Jim was even more demanding he would say,"You're not really

(continued)

sick, you're just trying to get out of doing the housework." Once I asked Jim to please help me do something -- even just take out the garbage, please I don't feel good. But Jim just said, "If you want the damn garbage out of the kitchen, I know a good place you could put it. You could shove it up your ass!" And Jim thought that was really funny and he walked away laughing.

And so I ran away. And I looked for a place to live and I found the townhouse on Grossmoor. I thought I was lucky to be alive, Sgt. Brooks. I wanted nothing more than to be alone and pull myself back together again. So, earlier this evening, I made a hot cup of tea and snuggled up in my bed to read and relax. And then I heard him.

I heard the noises at the front door and I shut off my bedroom light and listened. I was scared, Sgt. Brooks, and when, a few seconds later, I heard the door open, I started to shake all over. I knew he had found me. "Looks like my sweet little wife isn't home," I could hear him talking to himself. "Probably out whoring around on her dear loving husband. Ha, ha, ha. Well, that's all right, I'll just sit down and wait to give her the surprise of her life."

I could hear him moving around, Sgt. Brooks, so I decided to call the police. My phone was on the table next to the bed, but I was afraid he would hear me, so very slowly I got out of bed. I picked up the phone and cautiously carried it into the closet. I closed the closet door and sat down on some blankets I had stored in the corner of the floor. I carefully dialed the police emergency number and when they answered, I whispered, "This is an emergency. My name is Holly Martin. My address is 1313 Grossmoor. A man has broken into my house. Please come quickly." But the voice at the police station said, "Lady, please speak up, I can't understand you." So I tried to speak slower and more distinctly. I said, "Please, I am in danger. 1313 Grossmoor, Martin." But, just then I heard a noise so I hung up. I could hear him moving around and I realized he was looking around the house so I hid myself and the phone under the blankets and tried to pull down some clothes from the hangers above me to help conceal me.

"Where are you, Holly, Come out, come out wherever you are. I know you're here because I heard noises. Come on, Holly, you can't hide forever." Then the closet door flew open and I stopped breathing. My heart started leaping and pounding until I could hear the pounding echoing thorugh the house. I waited for him to pull me out from under the blankets, but, finally, the closet door closed. I could hear him moving around the bedroom, then finally leaving back toward the kitchen.

"Well, I guess I'm getting the DT's or something. This calls for a drink. I know that dumb teadrinking bitch doesn't have any good stuff around here. Good thing I carry a small supply for just such emergencies."

Then I heard more noises, but they were muffled and I couldn't hear clearly. It sounded like he was still talking, but I couldn't quite make out what he was saying. I carefully crept out from under the blankets and, still on my hands and knees, I reached up to open the closet door a little so I could hear what he was saying. I was hoping he was getting bored and was going to go find a bar to guzzle in. Then I could get out of there and go to the police.

As I opened the closet door, I could still hear muffled voices and I realized he was talking to someone, but I couldn't figure out who.

"Don't worry. She goes through these fits quite often. When they get worse, she has to back to the looney bin for awhile. Paranoia, I think they call it. But, don't worry, I'll see to it that she won't bother you again. As a matter of fact, I'll guarantee it! Yes, thank you, officer. Good night."

The police!

They did understand my phone call and they came! And now they were gone! And Jim knew I was there. I've got to get out of here quick! The window! I've got to get this window open. He'll kill me, I know he will. It's opening, I think, thank God. Ouch, oouch.

Yes, Sgt. Brooks. He found me trying to get out of my bedroom window. He came up behind me, grabbed me by the hair and jerked me back into the room, pitching me onto the bed.

"Going somewhere, bitch?" he

(continued)

said. "Thought you could get away from me again, huh?" He slapped me across the face. "Where the hell were you hiding, huh? You might as well get through that thick skull of yoursthat you aren't going to get away from me!" Then he got sarcastic. "Now is that any way for a loving wife to treat her loving husband? Why, I even missed you! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. Want to kiss and make up?" He seized my arms and dragged me toward him. He smelled of booze and reeked of sweat and filth. I turned away from him. He grabbed me by the throat.

"What's the matter? Ain't I good enough for you anymore? Mighty fancy lacy pajamas you have on. Did you buy them for a new boyfriend to see? Well, your husband wants them off!"

I wanted to throw up. I said to him, "Please, Jim, just go away and leave me alone. I haven't loved you for a long, long time. Please, I just want a divorce."

"A divorce? I'll kill you first. Nobody divorces me!"

Sgt. Brooks, that's when my mind started to piece together some facts. I sputtered, "Jim -- your first wife -- the car accident -- how did the accident really happen?"

"Shut up you stupid bitch!"

"Achh, my throat, Jim, I can't breathe!"

Jim was probably just trying to scare me, Sgt. Brooks, but I guess I panicked. As I flung my arms around, trying to struggle away from him, my hand found the lamp on the table. I only meant to startle him so he would release his hands from my throat. I must have swung too hard. I hit him on the back of his head. When I realized he was dead, I panicked and ran away. I left Jim in the townhouse on Grossmoor.

I am writing you this letter from the bus depot -- I will be in Mexico by the time you receive it.

I hope you understand. I don't want to go to jail.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Holly Martin

Well, hopefully, the police won't want to be bothered with me after they read this letter. Since it appears to be self-defense, they should just let the matter drop, rather than go through the trouble of dealing with Mexico. Ah, I finished just in time -- there's the phone. "Hello? Bob, my love! What? Yes, the apartment -- and the furniture you bought me -- it's all fantastic. But wait! I have some good news to tell you. I got my divorce! Yes, you might say it was hand-delivered by the judge earlier tonight. I was just having a drink to celebrate t e occasion -- hurry over, so you can celebrate with me! You can't? Why? What! Your wife? A car accident! How did it happen? Something must have jumped in front of her and made her lose control of her car -- oh, how horrible! Yes, sweetheart, I understand. You make the arrangements for the funeral, and when everything settles down, I'll be waiting for you right here. Bye, Love."

Well, now I can settle down and relax and finish off that bottle.

****

Michael A. Stillman

DAUGHTERS OF NYX (LATE SHOW)

A blind spot in the heart's eye,
A misunderstanding on the road to paradise,
Tripping on destiny's doorstep.

All night long Thinking of you
All night long Thinking of you
All night long What will I do?

Movies in my mind
Like a deaf man's river
I look down at my hands
And my blood brings a shiver.

(continued)

I replay every casual word,
Every flicker on your face,
Every touch of you hand,
Every moment of embrace.

The river will reach the ocean,
And the torrent will be calm.
The daughters of Nyx will smile,
And the torment will be calm.

****

Judy Belfield

BARELEGGED WE SIT

Barelegged we sit
in the lights-out living room,
curled up like fetuses
in our respective chairs,
as cigarette smoke writhes in the air
like transparent Medusa-head snakes.
The flickering television screen
showing an old black-and-white movie
flashes faint illuminations
on your thick, muscular thights,
and a dusky grayness
plays on your face.
It is halo-esque,
this television light,
though you certainly are not divine --
never <u>were</u>, in fact --
but there is a magic quality dancing about you,
as the film's lavishly orchestrated score
floats through the room.
Perhaps it was this magic
that first attracted me to you,
I think,
as you sit,
completely unaware of my meandering thoughts.
"Nineteen-forty-two,"
you say,
suddenly shaking me back.
I stifle a Huh? reaction
and quickly cover my inattention.
"Nineteen-forty-six,"
I say,
"and I bet you don't know who the little guy is."
"Get the book,"
you say, and I do,
turning on the light --
which breaks the spell.
"Nineteen-forty-five. I was closer,"
I say.
"Okay, okay. Who's the little guy?"
"Elisha Cook, Jr. . . .
do you really want to see
the rest of this movie?"

****

Michael A. Stillman

QUESTIONS

Would it mean anything to you
If it meant everything to me?
After all this time,
I still can't tell.
What do you care about?
What matters to you?
Your mind seems so shallow,
But your eyes seem so deep.
Am I giving it all to an illusion,
A hallucination,
The crystallization
Of a kaleidoscope imagination?

I wish I had some way of finding out.

****

David Moore

BIOLOGY TEST

"Termites have a type of protozoa that live in their gut," stated the biology teacher.

"Gross," exclaimed the young lady.

"Well, you have some living in your gut," replied the biology teacher.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha," laughed the chorus.

"Sick. We'd better kick her out," said the kid in the black and silver jacket. Nobody seemed to hear him.

"That protozoa allows the termite to digest wood cellulose," continued the teacher. "Without that protozoa, the termite could eat all the wood it wanted and still starve to death."

Yes, symbiotic relationships seemed to be amusing that day. No such humor surfaced when the teacher went on to parasitic relationships.

Meanwhile, across town, two people were getting married. For them, and their friends and relatives, it was an important event. But nobody else much cared. Except the preacher. So it wouldn't have been a very noteworthy event, save for the gift left by a mysterious stranger.

He crept into the church and placed a cylinder of shiny metal upon the table with all the edibles set out for the reception. Then he crept back out the door, snickering softly.

Soon the wedding guests were eating and drinking and cutting up the beautiful cake for no reason other than to eat it. They had absolutely no respect for the inanimate.

One of the more intelligent guests noticed the silvery container. "Golly, gosh, what is that?" he asked, stunned by his brilliant discovery.

"Heck, I don't know," answered the preacher.

Another curious bystander thrust it at the young bride. "It must be for you all. Why doncha open it, huh? huh? Hurry up lady, I ain't got all day."

She put her cake down, grabbed the container, swallowed what she had ingested, and twisted the lid off the cylinder.

Good Gawd, was it ever disgusting! The purple slimy thing squirted out and plopped onto the floor. It quivered like jelly for a moment, then flowed under the table.

"Gross!" exclaimed the bride, dropping the container. She didn't know that she'd echoed the words of the young lady over at the college.

"Oh, don't touch it!" wailed the mother-in-law.

Finally somebody called the handyman. He entered, coughing violently. "Where the hell is this thing?" he muttered.

"Don't swear," snapped the preacher.

"Cruddy thing's under the table," said the man who'd given the cylinder to the bride.

The handyman snorted as he looked under the indicated table. "Geesh! I'm not touchin' that frigging thing." So he went and got a dustpan and a baggie. Much to his surprise, the goop gushed into the pan of its own accord and freely slid into the plastic bag.

(continued)

Biology Test, continued

The handyman promptly sealed that bag and left the room. The reception continued.

By two in the afternoon, the handyman had appeared in the office of one of the biology teachers at the college. "I don't know what the bloody hell this critter is Doc, but I figured you'd want a gander at it."

He left the baggie on the teacher's desk and rushed off. The teacher poured the thing into a beaker and placed it in one of the labs. He would study it whenever time allowed.

That night it began to snow.

The next day, the biology class had a botany test in their lab -- first test of the semester, as was inevitable. There were three questions on the blackboard, but most of the test consisted of looking at specimens and answering questions about them.

After almost twenty-four hours in the beaker, the blobthing was getting bored. It knew there was more to its world than tiny containers. So, slowly, almost painfully, it forced its mass to the lip of its tiny prison. Success! It oozed out onto the shelf. Free at last, it wasted no time in dripping onto the floor.

It flowed around on the floor of that empty lab for awhile, then it streamed out through a doorway and into the lab where the poor, innocent students were being tested! Only four people were left, the others having departed. The teacher, the young lady, a kid in a blue coat, and the kid in the black and silver coat. The first two students were still testing, but the latter was just hanging around. After all, the Beverly Hillbillies wouldn't be on for an hour and a half.

The young lady and the kid in the blue coat didn't see the creature. They were too busy gazing at specimens. The teacher didnt see it gush around his feet. He was reading a taxidermy magazine. The kid in the black and silver coat didn't see it. He was gawking at a tank full of ferns.

It slid under another door, into a hall. Desperate for complete liberty, it oozed under an exit door. Out into the freezing winter blizzard.

The kid in the black and silver coat decided to leave before he made a nuisance of himself. So he went out into the hall and stared blankly at the falling snow.

A moment later, the young lady came out. They soon struck up a conversation. They talked about the test in general, and kelp in particular, as they walked out to their respective cars. Accidently, not even aware of it, he stepped on the frozen blob and crushed it into a thousand shards.

****

Mart Dickinson

THE ARGUMENT . . . MY SIDE

How dare you! How dare you let your lover run your life . . How could you let her hurt me through you? To let her take her insecurities out on me is appalling. It is too bad that you cannot see through those blinders she has put over your eyes. You would see how subjugated (pussy-whipped) you are, and how afraid you are to take a stand for your own rights!

You say that you have your own will, that you can do what you want . . .if this is so . . why do you spend most of your time trying to keep her appeased? You let her dictate almost your every move. It has gotten to the point that you do her will without her even having to be there! When I look at you, I see a man trying to navigate a small boat that has been riddled by termites and decay, and who is so busy plugging and re-plugging leaks and holes, that he forgets to steer, and ends up smashing his small boat on the jagged rocks, and up on the beach floats the debris of shattered dreams and longings, and probably your only chance at life.

Are you aware of your direction? Can you stand up and declare your rights? That is not to say that you should push away people who care and want to help, just don't let your lover take over your thinking process. You are enthralled just by the thought that this woman accepts you. Look around you -- your friends accept you and think you are beautiful. Think enough of yourself to look at your relationship objectively. What do YOU want from

(continued)

The Argument, continued

a relationship? It is YOUR show, so decide . . . do you want to lose your will, to lose your right to talk to whoever you want, to lose your decision-making capabilities, to live with jealousy, to have just sex?Or do you want joy and laughter and love and friendship and freedom and to really make love with (not to) your lover? If a relationship is fragile, is it worth keeping? We all do what we have to do to keep our place in the world , . and we all have to decide if the sacrifices are worth it. Please! Steer your own boat . . . open your eyes to the joy available to you. There is enough love out there to overwhelm you . . . crowds of people that will accept you just the way you are. It hurts me deeper than any wound to see you being controlled . . . . . .

****

R. Walser Yale

EXILE ON BROADWAY

Last night I walked
Around my block,
It wasn't late
But the sun had gone.

I walked around my block --
The core of my world.
In long strides
I took the lot
Across the street
And I started to smoke.

I headed north --
The old lady
In the window
Fluttered and
Slowly gazed
After me.

I was an outlaw --
Savage street youth.

The streets emptied --
The dim light
Casts huge shadows
Of a solitary figure,

Turning east
I ascend the stairs
To the hill
To look down on cars.

An apprehensive
Laotian walks beneath me --
But doesn't dare look up.
Not even in America.

I turn west --
As I descend the steps
At the red light
Cynical drivers
Lock their doors.

I see them
And I slow
To laugh at them.
But they are transfixed
By the light,
And do not see me.

Preserved
By the green light
They hurry off --
In their mobile asylums.

They are afraid
Of the derelict --
The derelict fears
Their fear.

In my path --
A still alarm,
In my wake --
A sigh of relief.

The glowing ash
Burns my finger
And I turn
Southeast
To escape
The paranoid night.

I walk to the porch
And turn out to
My childhood
Playground --
Black, numb, wild.

Suddenly cold,
I enter the house
And lock out
The perverse night.

****

Judy Belfield

A LABYRINTH OF ROOMS

A labyrinth of rooms
with unfinished oakwood floors
opens one into the other
and another into another
through doors and doors unclosed,
standing sentry,
three-quarters ajar
to each corresponding wall.
Something watches
through the turret windows --
its gaze as penetrating and as farreaching
as the sunrays
that dance into the empty rooms
hand in hand with twisting flecks and specks of dust.
It sees old feet approaching
in plain, black shoes --
sturdy, leather, simple, tired shoes --
and behind them
a rubber-thonged delicate pair
which cautiously, yet vibrantly, enters
and stops.
The something watches a faceless, white-haired man
in plain, black shoes
take off his shirt
to reveal a crepe-skinned chest --
flabby, loose, papery, ashencolored chest --
and extend his floppy forearms in invitation
while he smiles without teeth
and whispers without lips.
It sees a girl of fifteen
meet the man's embrace,
her face puzzled,
then surprised,
as the folds of their clothing
fall silently and vanish.
It barely seems to happen
and there is no memory of any sequence,
but only ephemeral details
that flash for a second and fade --
but the something has seen
and remembered all
and it follows her doggedly the daylong after,
almost imperceptibly tapping her shoulder now and again.
"Grampa,"
she says after once such tap,
and the sky is pinkly gray
until the night settles in
tucking its fingers under her chin,
interlacing hands with the allseeing something
and circling her head in haze.

****

Cathie Durkee

WHAT IS FEAR . . .

Fear is being a child of seven
and realizing that there is
something wrong with you that
only God and a very skilled
surgeon can correct

fear is being very ill and
seeing things climbing your
bedroom walls, when you have
a fever of 106

fear is having the doctors
perform test after test and
still shake their heads, not
knowing

(continued)

What Is Fear . . .,continued

fear is being put on a cold table and looking up at the moving ceiling as the nurses whell you down the hall

fear is a parent watching all this and placing their faith in God that their oldest child lives

fear is watching this child grow up never knowing from one day to the next if one kidney, damaged, will ever function normally

fear is seeing the child regress emotionally, not able to cope with a life even an adult would find difficult

fear is knowing she can destroy herself and you are helpless

fear is wondering one day to the next, one month to the next, and one year to the next what this child of yours will have to go through

fear is realizing that this child is flesh of your flesh

****

Lois J. Talbot

HOURS PASS AND ALL ARE WEARY

Hours pass and all are weary
And finally the clock says go
But one lone worker lingers at his desk
And we wonder why this is so

Everyone is gone now
The room is growing dim
But still he sits and works
Because he feels lonely within.

The minutes pass and soon he knows
That he too must be on his way.
He grabs his hat and starts for the door
As a kitten runs across the floor.

""Poor lonely thing," the man thinks to himself
And he picks it up to stroke
The kitten snuggles close and purrs
And he feels an inner glow.

A warm feeling came over the man
And he felt loved once more.
All because of a stray little kitten
That he picked up off the floor.

****

Mary Davisson

A NEW BEGINNING

Day after day we drive into the parking lot, carefully selecting our slots so our children won't have to walk too far in the icy weather. Day after day, we both arrive early -- we don't want our children standing in the cold waiting. Day after day, I notice this fiftyish weatherworn man who always parks next to me. In the heart of the winter, he keeps the engine of his rust-eaten station wagon running. "Why doesn't he get his muffler repaired?" I wonder all through January, February and March. We never speak. Our eyes rarely meet, though my two-year-old and he exchange waves daily.

The children are being dismissed from school. I unlock the car doors and brace myself for the onslaught. Day after day, my rear view mirror picks up this khaki-clad, gray-haired man with the crewcut trudging out of the car, walking to the school building to meet his son. He bends his weary body and his ungloved hands make sure the boy's jacket is zipped all the way up and the muffler is covering the nose. He walks the boy back to the car with his arm around him. He sits in the car for a moment to examine his son's papers. Pride beams from the tired eyes on sight of the fine work.

Finally, spring pierces through winter's chill. The man is no longer there to pick up his son. I meet his wife who has walked over to pick the boy up. She tells me that things are getting better. Her husband, having been laid off of work since Christmas, has now been recalled. This boy is the youngest of eight children. Now the rent can be paid. Yes, things will be better now.

Then, one day after school, my boys bring home the news -- their friend's father -- "You know, Mom, the man who always parked next to us in the school park-

(continued)

ing lot" is dead! An accident at work.

Shock grips me. Suddenly seized from life while at work. Seized from life just as things were getting better! Never to see his son's accomplishments. Never to see another spring or summer. Surviving the tough times just to be plucked from life when things get better. The unfairness! All the uncaring, self-indulgent people who survive and this man has gone to dust.

Then suddenly my seven-year-old son's words break through my cognition -- "And Mom, they said he was being planted today." At first, the terminology startles me . . then it hits me.

The young are closer to the Truth than I.

****

Judy Belfield

THREE LITTLE BOYS

Three little boys walk their bicycles across a busy street,
smiling as they dodge traffic
and magnificently large puddles.
At the other side,
they park their bikes
and recross the street --
only this time they don't miss the puddles.
The boys are black
but the shades are distinct:
one boy, like chocolate milk --
chalkysmooth and creamyskinned --
the second almost blue,
and the other like Kraft dark caramel.
Their beatup sneakers and those of a thousand other boys,
spring on the pavement,
attesting to the fact
that kids run faster and jump higher
in any brand of shoe.
Their spry legs
covered in denim
flex, become taut,
flex again,
as they dart
from here to there.
In the summertime,
after a crazy rain,
the little boys come out to play
in clusters throughout the city,
and the streets echo silently with an endless stream of schemes --
what to do with water!

****

R. Walser Yale

THE FATE OF THE LYNX

Left to the tender mercies
Of the shrewd catamount,
The upright species --
(Not counting the savant)
Fled their carbonized cities.

The wildcats legions --
Pliant, lunatic trolls
Shadowed the masses
Of weeping, worried fools
And drove them into seared hills,
Hundreds of miles they roamed
Where clannish insanity kills
The herds with no home.

Triumphantly, the intoxicated
Unhinged trolls
(And their unfortunate slaves)
Turn back to the ancestral
City of Ashes

(continued)

The Fate of the Lynx, continued

Orange skeletons, the slag frames
Of tremulous structures
Still stand -- unchanged
But the mortar turned cinders
Has dropped the brick into great mounds.

Yet, the cat's decrepit throne
Is far from dead!

Buried in the embers and under
The stone, crustaceous creatures thrive
Mute, strong, heavily armored.
The ancient crawlers still live.

In the noxious darkness,
Retarded dogs moan and howl
Now out seep the vermin -- wicked rats!
Starving adders, without a sound
Hunt their prey

Through the winding streets
And across the river, a standing red
Pool of caustic ooze,
Live the learned ones --
The instinctive, absurd dregs.

In the black night,
The surreptitious creatures
Elude the cat's keen eyes,
Desperately seeking the snakes
Nocturnal meat.

At the end of the night,
Signaled by a brownish
Grey dawn.
The dregs retire
To their dwellings of stone.

Some, bellies full, dance
In the street.
Antagonizing bands
Of the feline's enforcers --
The damned trolls!

Aimless battles rage
In the street
Until both forces spent,
Aimlessly retreat.

Now all is silent
Nothing stirs!
How complete
The sinsiter
Infinite silence.

The catamount descends
The upright, rational
Lynx
Is present.

He is an oracle,
A Spartan.
He is insensate, raving,
Lost.

With a cool
Animated ease,
He prowls
The exploded city.

He had memorized
The circuit --
He had stalked these
Streets before.

When his foreign forces
Made war
With the natives --

When the clamorous
And dogmatic
Trolls
Saw cataclysmic
Victory

And drove the chagrined,
Bloodied columns
And fugitive kin
To the defeated hills.

He greedily
Surveys
The slaughter.

The beast returns
To his throne --
Smug, sated
And makes a gesture
To the head troll:
"Have the dead cremated."

Off the sulphuric banks
Of the river
A squadron of dregs and trolls
Comrades -- bloody and rank
Tumble and roll.

Alone in subterranean
Chambers,
The lynx sleeps.

Lurid annals
Of extortionate men
Unfold in his deranged,
Semi-conscious brain.

Awakened by a hideous
Scream --
He bounds to a mirror
And falls
Into crystalline jade eyes.

Crushed, he slides
Down the wall
To begin
The vigil

Until the abject,
Venomous troll,
The cold blooded
Molested dreg,
And the electrified,
Homesick clans
Unite.

****

David Moore

NIHILISTIC NEW YEAR

January 23, 2010. That was the day They announced that God had died. I remember that moment well. It was one of those rare periods in Our glorious history when a vicious blizzard had all but shut down the operation of the technological wonderland. It was noon, but the sky was dark gray, even darker than the uniform towers of the City. And the wind and snow whipped savagely at any mortal who dared expose Himself.

So, naturally, like most of My fellow citizens, I was in My cubicle apartment watching the Newsreview on My telescreen. I was wrapped in a thick blanket, lying upon My couch, and feeling My age. There was another power shortage that winter, and My quarters were rather chilly. I held My cat Wilhelm securely in My arms. He was perfectly content to have His back scratched. I could tell, he was purring. So content with so little. But then, I was content with My telescreen and cozy position too.

And that was when They announced that God was dead. After that bombshell was dropped, the reporter gave some brief biographical information. The trouble was that Nobody remembered the Deceased's birthdate, or how He got His start. But then, Nobody had been very close to Him, although many had claimed to be. God never was one to make friends easily. He was just too intimidating. People were afraid of Him, afraid to question Him. But God can hardly be blamed for human weakness. It wasn't like He'd ever really tried to freak people out.

I was sorry to hear about His death. I really was. We had never been able to relate to each other, I admit. But in my younger days, I'd often wandered through the tiny forest preserves, and I had admired His work. He had been a fantastically intricate artist, and massively productive too. But I never could develop a sense of kinship with Him. His groupies had always turned me off.

I was invited to the funeral, of course. After all, I had once been famous. So I put on my galoshes and parka and off I went. Naturally, They had to make the whole thing an extravagant mockery of dignity. There were thousands of mourners. Most of them were like Me, has-beens who'd been cast aside by the advances of Our society. And We were treated like a herd of mindless cattle. We milled around the vast tomb as those in power hogged all the publicity. It was a bitterly cold day, too. I never would have gone if I'd had the right to refuse. Even though I've always believed funerals to be a rip-off, that doesn't mean they should be converted into a circus. Especially a cheerless one.

As I left that cemetery of ideals, I couldn't help but think that God would never have died if Our souls weren't in a terminal state. Our could should be finely tuned instruments equipped with sophisticated abstract senses. Their nature is to be seekers, looking for permanent happiness. And they need freedom to search. But even under good conditions, most happiness is temporary. And we hardly live in a proper environment. For all intents and purposes, Our goals have become based on Our confusingly complex economic system. And that is not a proper environment for a healthy soul to be functioning in. No indeed, it is a very cramped, narrow, and corrupting world. And it is jam-packed with cramped, narrow, and corrupting competition. All goals have become material, or infected by materialism. So souls have become vestigial handicaps. As with all institutions, the economic system has deteriorated. It has become a vicious trap. And it is the unchallanged paragon of all our institutions. It is Our reality. A reality that is almost completely impossible to escape.

Oh yes, religion gives some relief. I admit that. Its simple answers to complex problems are indeed the salvation for many individuals. But it can't work for all of Us. You see, it demands a person to suppress aspects of his or her inner nature just as the economic system does. We must become devout, or even fanatical. We must hide behind veils of original sin, basic evil, falling short of divine expectations. Can't We understand that We are primates with souls? But no, those who seek knowledge must choose between science and religion. They lose something either way. Science has no soul. The universe slowly grows vaster, We seem to become more aware of its mechanical nature. Yet it also becomes more threatening. How can one person's life and happiness matter when confronted by infinity? So we turn to religion. It makes us special, it makes Us God's children. We have a place in the scheme of things after all. But religion lacks tolerance of human nature when you get right down to it. What is called sin and weakness is merely part of Our nature. And religion can make a person into a cheerful robot, spouting the same doctrines over and over and over again. Oh yes, We could use a god. But We need a god who is a friend, not a master. We don't need to accept a god. But We need a god who accepts Us.

Science denies the soul. Religion denies the primate. And materialism-devours all.

Look at Us! We're running around Our

(continued)

collective existence trying to find something. And when We're frustrated, We become so insecure that We have to look for ways to oppress others to prove Our own superiority. We all do it, no matter what path We follow. We all look down on someone or something. We all do! Even I do, and I'm an artist and amateur philosopher. I just use different standards. And it's all because We have failed to reconcile the primate with its soul, Our social programming with Our abstractions. At least, that's My subjective opinion.

But this is hardly meant to be a sermon. It's just that the death of God had its effect on Me. I apologize.

I made my way home from the funeral. Maybe it was such a fiasco because it was a rush job. They didn't even allow Themselves time to clear the streets of the snow from that blizzard. But I guess I see the point. They could hardly leave God's body lying around. Spiritual stench, you know.

After My dinner that evening, I decided to paint a picture. Sometimes I wonder why They even let Me paint. My style of art is hardly popular anymore. And anything that doesn't sensitize the masses, helping Them forget Their dilemma, is frowned upon as a useless habit. In My youth, it was called Modern Art. Now it's just a bit of historical trivia.

And I painted and spread broad swirls of colors. I formed an orderly chaos that didn't clash. Oh yes, I made it blend ever so nicely. I lost Myself in My creativity. It's My drug. I never need those barbiturates handed out to the poor by Their welfare programs.

And Wilhelm came over to Me and rubbed against My leg. It was his suppertime. He's always most affectionate when he wants something. And I had to stop creating. It was good to know that My pet needed Me, but it was distracting.

As I went to find the cat food, I noticed that it was snowing again. And I felt tired. It had been a hard day. I'm getting old. So please excuse Me if I can't think of any more Worth saying.

A sense of dogmatic gloom
Has seeped into the darkness of
clockwork shadows
Infiltrating to the core of heresy
Upsetting literal constants that
have no basis
In a malevolently malleable cosmos
that secretly worships
Chaos and its cousin
The stage is not set
But the curtains of predestination
are rising
Pulled up by withered and ancient
hands

Multi-eyed blobs raise their shapeless heads high to limbo
The mud castles melt in the laughing
rains
God is dead and rotting
His body is the universe
Philosophical maggots have infected
the corpse
The stars grow briefly brighter
Then burn out until the next celestial pyre is constructed
Nihilism stalks the ruins of
Economica
The shadows gibber mindlessly at
substance
Robots must under layers of corrosive fungus
Nothing is green
Nothing is red
Nothing is

The audience applauds loudly.

****

Melissa Wessell

THE DEVIL IS

The Devil is
melting.
Goodbye, Devil,
we sail on beyond
your afternoon reach now,
sail on past the
tops of your
wincing arms, ascending.
Goodbye, Old Man.

****

David Moore

HOLY HOKUM

By all the gods who ever roamed the backyards of limbo!
The cosmos itself has been cracked
Its life-blood dripping from celestial horizons

And look out in the anonymous farm-yard
It is Hikal, ruler of the empty lands within
A faceless demon-king, spreading vast wings of membrane

(continued)

Holy Hokum, continued

Oh green and furry abyss dweller
Lacking visage save for the aura of blood-red eyes
That watch as the galactic juices gush down in profusion
Showering the rainbow dog
Dissolving it in an Alka-Seltzer fizzle
And absorbed by the dry and thirsty ground

Hikal watches neutrally, ever the observer
He who never participates
He who grows through knowing, not action

Out of the farmhouse there rushes a warrior-born
Fortified by golden plate-mail
Two-handed battle-ax raised high over featureless helmet
It is stained by the yellowish blood of insectoids
The knight charges the Lord of Apathy
Hikal, master of many forms, all irrelevant
The veteran weapon is buried deep
Deep into the core of madness
Cutting through the outer defenses, into the beyond
That inner fiber which is at one with the universe
It spews out as a metamorphic waterfall
And is absorbed by the dry and thirsty void.

****

Linda K. Horras

RIDING THE RAIL

It is like a speckled plain -- an endless plain,
looming magnificently in front of my glassed view;
Maybe a house this time or a steeple the next to dot the
rolling land,
Or maybe it's the endless rows of husked soldiers,
all bobbing in a mock salute: "Come join us!
Come join us!"
But I can't hear, the glass only yielding to the constant
chug, chug, chug.

Moving now, my picture changes,
greenery surrounds the pane;
Like a thick yarn the huge trees are embroidered on my
somewhat fixed image;
All I know is what I see from out my moving screen . . .
And the undaunted chug, chug, chug.

Town by town or valley by valley,
the scene remains the same;
Still following the path of iron to a destiny much like these --
a plain, a tree, a cornfield, a house . . .
and to silence the weary chug, chug, chug.

****

Adriane Saylor

THE SPIDER . . . AND I

With one leg always free,
he inches along the filament road;
Never falling, but rooted in a creation
of dazzle and spangled splendor.
He creeps along his territory,
spitting the future out into the light;
He watches through the lines of glory,
the crazy azure of dawn and the mad purple
of sunlight across the world.

(continued)

The Spider . . .And I, continued

He sees the dip and swagger of butterfly
and moth and ant and wasp.
All those wings, those glass, glittering
panes to be seen through.
All those creatures caught in one moment,
by straying too close to the naked beauty
of his silk;
Those ones the wind will not take back.
In such a moment I fell into the silver
between the silent darkness of your hair and
everything fell away to nothing.
And by the time you noticed me in your web,
I was already a goner . . .

****

Adriane Saylor

PIRANHA

Hours eat into the mind,
erasing what has gone before,
night blots up memories and they are nothing;
Touch that has fevered into flame,
now fans down, like the coals of a
Summer bonfire.
Words bounce off the silence and
dance with my fears all around the room,
I am blackened to an ash, as
the night burns itself to the end.
And where are you,
and what silence is this that
my heart now knows?
It is certainly not peace,
although there is that supposition too;
Dreams, and their sisters,
wishes keep me company in the thin
pane between madness and resolution.
And in the end, your darkness is all I have,
the one line of hope in my confusion.
It is love and I will not give it up,
nor will I be saved by a promised visit
on the shore of sleep . . .

****

J. D. Guse

IN THE KITCHEN, WAITING FOR SUNRISE

I sit within a stable room
staring at the uncontrollable nature
and how beautiful she looks today.
The wind makes the ripples go
and the ripples make the river flow.
The water looks like a sequined dress
as Mr. Sun makes his debut.

****

Cathie Durkee

FALL

I hate to see the shimerald grass
Turn murkish yellow in fall
To see ten foot of partly cloudy
Along the blankest highway

I dislike any season
But the springiest summer
And think naught of reddish gold leaves
As they messy up the forest

I don't care for smoldering haziness
Of their burning in a pile
Nor of heavy gray clouds
Dumping their heaviness on me

The beauty of flowerama
In a marriage of color
I am deeply in love with chlorophyll

Life's illustion stuck
Danky, swamp prevails
Nothingness and fog

Relationships, frosty
A cold window pane
Blistery winds across the prairie

What is this coldness
This stuck place
The emptiness upon my soul

****

Simon

BLACK, DARK WITH YELLOW SLIT-EYES

Black, dark with yellow slit-eyes,
Cunning self-sufficient rodent-bite
Touching the invisible question world.
Inferior dislike, point, sharp, tear, shred.
Liquid style superiority with sleek grace,
Noiseless, precision motion none can compare.
Digging red warmth for nothing.
Zero prodigality, all proficient leadership
Knows its silent place.
Solid immovable prediction.
Hiss, spit with hatred, damned to survive eternity
In an alien universe.
Forced to the height of beast by foreign suicidal
Primate masters.
Altered tangibility to assume lower life,
Imprisoned forever by God's evolution.
You can't play a piano with an ice pick.
A painful crying univoice tells secrets, but doesn't
Speak them.
The centuries show us different similarity.
Mystery preys unfinished, infinitely doomed from its
Endowment.
Earth knows not this FELINUS SAPIEN.

****

Sharon Odehnal

SING!

Sing to the trees and the skies and the birds
And you'll find they will sing back to you.
Sing with your heart and soul, and not words --
Sing, sing, sing, and the world will be new.

Laugh with the winds and the grass, and the
flowers
Oh, laugh with Mister sun in the sky,
Laugh with yourself and stop all the showers -
Laugh, laugh, laugh, till you cry.

Run with the clouds and the days, and the deer.
Yes, run free to your rainbow's end.
Run to your Master and sing without fear --
Run, run, run, to your friend.

****

J. Aschenbrenner

IT'S RAINING

It's raining
outside my window.
The drops
splatter against the glass.
Falling gently
holding hands
as they meander down the pane.

****

RAINBOWS AND STORMS

Just as I see the horizon ahead
A rainbow beginning to form,
My eyes are held to a cloud instead
And I am lost in a storm.

It seems that life is illusion-
filled
A mirage around every bend,
When I wonder will storms be stilled?
Perhaps when my words are penned.

The thunder rolls and wind blows
I'm sure I'll hard.
I'm sure I'll crash on the rock
With nothing left except a shard
Of my mind, the weathercock.

Then I'm caught by the sun once more
And its light allows me to see,
That I can stand upon any shore
And be what I want to be.

****

Adriane Saylor

STORM

Gray shoots down its bullets
to wet the earth;
Slicks up the street and spangles
the window with sudden brilliance.

(continued)

Storm, continued

The trees are royalty, in the diamonds
from the sky;
Their backs nearly break as the wind
pushes against their green-frocked bodies.
And in the space of seconds,
the world is a torn curtain, waving back and forth
between the fury of nature's temper tantrum.
It is momentary, this beating of trees
and berating the buildings with gusts of fury.
It is like love,
this all-day storm, this riot of the sky.
A grey, large, consuming something,
that will not be pushed away, until, like love
it has wet and soaked through every pore exposed.
Only then will the clouds part for sun to show
itself in splendor once again. . .

****

Ernest McCabe

WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO SEND
or
REFLECTS ON WAITING IN A PARKING LOT

As I sit here on the bare boards of this bench, I feel the wind telegraphing chilly messages to my nervous system. My mind is set in neutral, ready to go, but still waiting for some unknown conveyance to arrive. I put it in gear and start thumbing through the possibilities.

There are a few things I know it could not be. In all probability, it could not be a kite, since a kite would not be powerful enough to get me off this hard hard ground. It could not be a bird, since I know of no bird capable of lifting a six-foot tall, one-hundred-ninety pound payload.

The vehicle could conceivably be a blimp, although, since the crash of the Hindenburg, that fashion of travel has gone up in smoke. It is occasionally reviewed for certain American festivals in which groups of men gather to see which one can more effectively beat out the brains of the other. I must rule out this possibility, however, since these gatherings are usually held in fall or the dead of winter.

I am pretty well certain that it is not a submarine, since I have not heard of Datsun submarines. Although I suppose the Japanese some day will get into submarine building. They seem to be manufacturing everything else. Aside from that, the problem with sending a sub would be enormous, since most of the tensile steel in a submarine would not be strong enough to move through the grass beds and roll over the wavelike trees with their crisp green froth. No, a sub would not work, even if they had one at their disposal.

I suppose I should not feel as I do with all of the subterfuge and disgust that is howling violently in my belly and the bitter taste that is buttering my lips with oil of grasshopper breath.

I notice a couple of garbage turkey trucks and think, not even they could be so cruel as to send those vulturous creatures to pick me up with their slimy refuse packed fingers. A fork lift? No, not enough range. Although it would be slow enough. God does not recharge fork lifts on request.

****

J. D. Guse

GOVERNMENTAL-LOVE

However many times I admit "love is free and pure, and can never be harmed by any outside additives," I must also realize that somewhere along the line, the government proposed the *infamous unwritten* bill called "The Love Tax." One may ask how could anyone tax love? I hear your hungry cries for the not-so-famous -- on occasion, warped -- Guse reply.

Yes, folks, Uncle Samuel has done *it* again. I have not found any *authentic written documents concerning* how the government *intervenes* in one's most private affairs, but I am forced to admit

(continued)

that my phone bill was of an exceedingly large amount due to intimate, sometimes perverse, conversations held on the talking box. Not that I, of all people, would complain, but obviously our number one obsession in life -- to find a full-time companion -- is being destroyed because people are just too concerned about where their money goes. In other words, Mr. G. (as in Government and Green) says, "We can make a bundle if we tax love and marriage and things like that."

Oh boy, I let another one out of the bag -- marriage. Just about everyone I know who is married has some complaint about feeding the extra mouth in the house on April 15. Let's face it, the government intervenes in just about everything else, why shouldn't they get some part of the relationship too? OK, so now we've hit upon another subject -- dates. Let me set the scene. You schedule a date, over the phone of course (Federal Communications Tax), then you drive to the girl's house, if you are a male. And of course you are using gas, which not only costs money, but has a Federal Tax to boot. If by chance a movie is on the agenda, you are in luck -- movies are not taxed. However, you do pay an upper and lower extremity (arm and a leg) just to gain entrance to the most prestigious cinema house in the city. And of course, you see such classics as Jaws III, People 0 and Debbie Does Dallas. And of course, after the show, your date has this immense craving for an authentic German meal -- thick-crust pizza with a raw egg in the center (a four seasons pizza). One must not forget that no matter how bad the meal is, one must pay a tax for it and for the inevitable indigestion. Oh, yes -- a complete date can not conclude until the drinks have been served, in the back seat of a car of course. Gotcha again. You buy the booze, you pay the tax.

So you see, love is a three-way street: you, your date, and Uncle Samuel. However, the opportunity exists for excluding the Money Man from your love life.

First of all, you could die. (No tax for death.)

Second, in reference to phone calls, one may call from a pay phone to a loved one at another pay phone. Keep in mind, however, that someone must reverse the charges on the phone call. And by all means, don't pick up the receiver when the operator calls back to get your name.

Thirdly, take your date on a bicycle trip.

Fourthly, become a Ewell Gibbons fan. (Eat wild hickory nuts.)

And lastly, remember, God made grass; man made booze. Who do you trust?

****

Judy Belfield

DON'T COMPLAIN TO ME ABOUT THE ECONOMY

Don't complain to me about the economy --
I got troubles of my own.
I don't wanna hear about the fiscal year
or deficit spending
or cuts unending,
except for defending.
Inflation's just a new sensation
that's getting rather old --
older than the gold in Fort Knox,
which is kept under locks
and fluctuates by the hour --
an unseen, possibly nonexistent, power-conferring entity
that lacks nobility and class.
Economy talk is a pain in the ass,
as passe as primal scream
and ESP and Gestalt, and dream interpretation.
It's as old as the hills,
and as boring as that last phrase
no matter what the phase:
the upward swing,
the familiar ring of the downward trend,
money on the mend,
or the rapid decline.
I decline to take an interest in conversations about interest
rates
or deflation measures
or financial pressures.
Tell me of sunshine and stars,
for I am a Scarlett O'Hara
who doesn't care

(continued)

Don't Complain To Me About The Economy, continued

for all this "talk, talk, talk of war!"
Recession, depression --
all this talk of money.
I don't give a damn.

****

Charles Hinton

DEAD PLANT'S LAMENT

The ivy grows on empty halls
The switchboard's quiet -- no more calls
The building creaks and moans its loss
We lost it all to weeds and moss

The rustling of our steno's skirts
The fluttered lashes when she flirts
Are all behind us now we rue
The pains we gave "the chosen few"

This plant was once alive with work
We made some wealth when it would perk
But now the footsteps that we hear
Are old men passing to be near . . .

They look upon the bricks of red
And shuffle on with nodding head
"Alas, we could have saved it when
We took a break as long as ten . . ."

We n'er showed up except "on call"
We took a bundle from it all
We've killed the goose that laid our eggs
So now we pass on idle legs

A muddy pond our tear drops make
A sad true lesson for our sake . . .

****

David Moore

ARIZONA BLUES

Hey there! How ya doing? I don't know if there's anyone else still alive out there in the whole wide and wonderful world. But feel free to stop by sometime. I'm here in Arizona, in the middle of the world-famous Petrified Forest, sittin' on a 200-million year old tree stump. I guess it's just as much a living thing as any other tree now. And this desert is a paradise, compared to those radioactive wastelands I came from. It seems so fresh and cool, even though it's high noon in July. I've even seen a few other living things since I got here. The trouble is, I ain't sure why I came here. I don't remember very much at all anymore. I think I was looking for someone I once knew, but I don't know who. Goddamn it, I can't even figure out my own name. Where was I? Oh yeah, out in the desert. I'm probably the last person alive, at least in this country. Won't be for long, though. Just about had it. Jesus, all those people are dead. Everybody except me. Everybody! Guess fate made a good choice. I'm pretty sure I was one of those types who had nothing to live for. And that's all that's left -- nothing. Wait a minute! Over on that stone log! It's some sort of lizard. You know, I really like these old rock trees, all their weird color schemes appeal to me. This lizard, the species looks familiar. I used to know my reptiles fairly well. I didn't know much about humans, but I could tell a horned toad from an American chameleon. The little critter is looking at me kinda funny. His head is sort of turned up, and he's got one eye on me. I guess he didn't expect to find any of my kind left. How do I know it's a "he"? I don't. He's probably wondering how long it's gonna take me to die. Then his kind can take over the world again, get a second chance. Wish I had a second chance now. Wish I'd been able to do something with my life. Wonder if there's a Heaven and Hell. Guess I'll be findin' out soon. Can't stand that lizard gawking at me. Go on, beat it! Let me die in peace, you little bastard. You guys have been waiting all these millenia for us to snuff ourselves out, you can wait a few more minutes. God, I'm sick. My skin's all grey and it's been peeling off in acres. And i ain't been able to eat anything in days. It comes right back up quicker than it takes to go down. And i just ran outta water. i'm either numb or in agony. don't know if anybody else is out there or if you even care but i care about you justcauseyou're anothergod-forsaken person in a man-madehell you neverwanted but if youwere one ofthe scumwho pushed the button i forgiveyou what else can i do?

****

Judy Belfield

FOURTH OF JULY WEEKEND

Rattatat,
the sounds of independence,
so much like mini-wars at every corner
after the sun went down on Thursday,
continuing until Monday night --
it was a long weekend.
Church spires black
against a pinkfluff sky,
the Methodist church sign
announces the Sunday sermonsubject:
Freedom From Fear --
Freedom's just another word for . . .
Well, folks,
wave those flags as the drums roll
and the marching girls in short skirts
do their stickylegged routines in the humid head,
and the fireworks look like powderpuffs
that fizzle and sizzle
and blow off hands
and we hear about every fifth of July --
the tragedies --
and we're as free as we're ever gonna be,
which is not free at all
or free at last.
Yet we hear a blast from the past --
a rocketshooting red glare
of gory independence
gained by the blood of fathers' fathers
all the way back through an infinitymaze of deaths,
and we're proud to be Americans --
love it or leave it,
our country right or wrong.
The churchbells ring out
what?
New freedom is a sanitary pad
also stained with,
you guessed it.
Where does it end
and where did it begin?
What day is it now?
It was a long weekend.

****

Mary Davisson

JOLIET'S FINEST NEWSPAPER

J oliet's finest newspaper -- its only one too,
O nly way round to find out who's who.
L ivin pages -- macaroni recipes you can trust,
I rish sports page* -- information on who's gone to dust.
E xciting tidbits in News in Brief,
T hird page coverage of the world's grief.

H oroscopes to help you plan romance, travel and luck,
E xtra coupons on Wednesdays help you stretch your buck,
R ealty, cars, assorted ads for the elite,
A ssociated Press reports on the Washington beat,
L ocal politicians with their axes to grind,
D ear Abby -- sad letters often left unsigned.

N ews of the births, marriages and weather reports,
E yewitness accounts of all the local sports,
W hiteside's column is a bright spot, and yet,
S erves its best purpose when housebreaking your pet.

*Obituary column

****

Marge Peterson

NELLS

Ten years ago, Nells had graduated from the Art Academy. Armed with youthful enthusiasm and confidence, he looked forward to a bright future as an artist. His exceptional record at art school had led him to believe that the world would be as excited about his work as his instructors had been. He had returned to the northern town where many happy summers had been spent in painting, and, in the evenings, waiting tables to pay for each coming school year.

The town was a summer place, where the rich and not-so-rich came from all over the country to spend their vacations on sunny lake beaches and in fashionable restaurants, and their money on arts and crafts that filled the rustic shops lining the quaint streets. It seemed a perfect place for a beginning artist to sell his paintings with the hope of becoming known.

He had built a rough, but sturdy, structure five miles from town, accessible by an adequate dirt road, which was to serve as home and studio. It was surrounded on three sides by white birch and pine, and on the fourth side was a field of wild flowers which sloped downward to a lake. He had been very pleased with the set-up and settled in to work.

Nells loved his work, spending long hours painting the beauty he saw in the dunes, the town, and the forest around him, returning to his studio as the daylight failed, to continue painting from mental images and sketches he had collected. Often he would forget to rest until the clamor of the birds celebrating sunrise would interrupt his concentration, reminding him of the passage of time and his own fatigue.

A small gallery in town had agreed to display and sell his paintings, taking a percentage of each sale for themselves. Nells' paintings were hung on long walls with the work of many other artists. Occasionally, there was a sale, but the public seemed to show no preference for Nells' work, and he was finding the income insufficient to support himself, although his needs were quite basic. Hunger began to take its toll, affecting his energy and ability to concentrate. Dreams are hard to give up, however, and each day Nells told himself that soon sales would pick up, that people would soon realize the special qualities of his work.

Simon

BELLS RING

Bells ring. Open eyes gorge, sardine motion with smells of lunch box bananas, dragging out to see Betsy Ross before a giant cube. Bells ring and time goes slow, brain space filled with chocolate milk, dates of numberfacts, instructor personality is of major influence. We are all shaped different but we must conform. Bells ring, essential nutrition. Bells ring, tough drain on hard flattop elbows, big downward fall with ridicule, great flying rubber loops stinging or sphere expectorant wood pulp sailing complete with ruler wrist, more space is satisfied. Bells ring, sprint out sardine motion of perspiration relocking to origination. But to get a good job you can't be a square peg.

****

One spring day, he moved his easel to a spot down by the lake. He hoped the reawakening of the world around him would renew his spirit, giving him the energy to continue. The soft, warm breeze ruffled his hair. Sunbeams dappled the new growth around him while the scent of fresh spring flowers filled his senses. He looked across the lake, mentally framing a section of the view he wanted to interpret into paint. A brushed-in sketch slowly appeared, but soon he began to feel distracted, his concentration eluding him even as he fought to maintain it. Putting his hands on his hips, he looked away, heaving a deep breath full of frustration.

Not far away, a wide slanting beam of sunlight slid down through the dark foliage of an evergreen grove. A vibrant spot of color floated in its midst, catching Nells' eye. As it passed through the sunbeam and moved on toward Nells, he noted that it appeared to be a butterfly of great size with glowing rich colors like a stained glass window. He held out his hand and was amazed when it lit there. He had failed to notice that the body of the butterfly was not the usual worm-like form, but was actually a tiny, perfectly formed man. He jumped slightly when his eyes rested on the figure, causing the butterfly to have to flutter slightly to keep from losing its footing. The little man laughed melodiously.

"What are you!" asked Nells, incredulously.

"I am called Seth, and am of the tribe Boheim," laughed the butterfly. "Do I startle you?"

"Will you hurt me?" asked Nells.

"Do I look like I could hurt you?"

(continued)

asked Seth. "I live in the glen at the other end of the lake," Seth continued, "just beyond the Impossible Thicket, the one you have tried several times to get through. My whole tribe lives there. We create things."

"What things?" asked Nells.

"Oh, golden goblets set with jewels, paintings of charm, mystical fabrics, to name a few. Tonight we celebrate spring and many of our treasures will be on view. Would you like to see? You are welcome to join our festivities. I will be back for you at nine."

With that, Seth leaped from Nells' arm and disappeared in the leaves above, never giving Nells a chance to answer.

"Hey, wait!" said Nells, staring up after him and twisting around with hopes of spotting him again, but Seth was gone.

Later that evening, Nells sat on his back steps listening to the birds singing their evening songs and watching the beginning of the sunset behind the lake.

Nells jumped as a voice beside him said, "It's beautiful, isn't it?" Seth was seated on the rail beside him, knees up and chin in his hands, as if he had been there for quite a while.

"You didn't expect to see me again, did you?" asked Seth. "Are you coming to our party?"

Seth had been right. Nells hadn't really expected to see him again. He had even been wondering if his imagination had been playing tricks on him. After all, a tiny man with butterfly wings wasn't something one expected to see. Nells felt very restless tonight and really didn't know what to do with himself. At a party, at least he could get something to eat, and if the rest of the tribe looked like Seth, it would certainly be something to see.

"Sure," said Nells, "let's go."

Seth immediately leaped forward in the air and floated off gently with Nells following. As they approached the Impossible Thicket, the shrubbery parted and they stepped through into a glen full of motion. The air was full of Boheims like Seth. Some were hanging tiny Tiffany lamps on gossamer string across the glen. Others hung crystal windchimes on the tree-branch tips that tinkled softly in the breeze. On the ground, figures like Seth scurried to and fro with trays of food and jeweled goblets of vine. A large group of Boheims flew across toward Nells and Seth bearing a huge golden goblet and a tray of food. They placed it on a mossy knoll by a tree for Nells.

"Please sit here," said Seth, "relax and enjoy your evening. I must join my people."

Seth seated himself at the head of a long oaken table. Motion ceased immediately as all became seated. Seth raised his goblet. All the Boheims stood and raised their goblets in the air saying in unison:

"Here's to the sun's burning glow
of gold,
Here's to the moon, both new
and old,
Here's to the past, present, and
to come,
And here's to the magic in everyone."

With that, they all drank deeply, then seating themselves, began to devour the feast before them. Nells, too, drank deeply and partook of the much needed sustenance with great pleasure. The food seemed unlimited. No sooner had one serving platter been emptied when it was replaced by another.

As the sun completed its sunset, a beautiful music began to play. All the tables and chairs disappeared in haste and the tiny people began to dance, some on the ground, and some in the air. Nells leaned back against a tree to watch the spectacle. Another goblet of fine vine was placed in his hand. Slowly, a large silvery moon rose and hung straight above, as if it had been commissioned to shine just so to illuminate this glen of wonder. The Boheims sparkled and glittered as if they had a light within. Sometime during the festivities, Nells fell into a deep sleep and rested more completely than ever before. The Boheims covered him with a fine blanket, so light it could hardly be felt, but so warm it was all anyone would ever need.

In the morning, he awoke with the clear rays of sun on his eyelids and a basket of leftovers by his side. Nells stood up and stretched. There was nothing left of the night's festivities -- it looked like any other glen. Nells tossed the blanket in the basket and headed back home, stepping through the Impossible Thicket where it parted for him.

Upon reaching home, Nells ate from the basket and prepared to work. He felt better than he had in ages, refreshed with no nagging hunger pains. As he painted, he found his ability to concentrate was much improved and was soon lost in his work.

And so it continued for many days. Each time Nells was hungry, he ate from the basket which never was empty of food. At the end of the week, Nells began to feel quite puzzled by the basket. He also began to notice that his easel and the tables seemed higher than they had been before. By the end of the second week, it became obvious that Nells was shrinking. He could barely reach the table tops. It had to be the doing of the Boheims, thought Nells angrily, and something had to be done about it.

He headed to the glen where the party had been. It took much longer this time because of his shorter legs. The Impossible Thicket did not part for him as it had before, and was so much higher. He pushed and pulled at the bushes,

(continued)

but could not get through. "Seth!" he shouted, "let me in! A terrible thing is happening and I know it's your fault! Seth!"

He yelled and yelled. Finally, Seth appeared over the thicket. He smiled at Nells as though nothing was changed.

"What a nice surprise," said Seth, "but what on earth are you yelling about?"

"What am I yelling about?" yelled Nells, "look at me! I'm a midget!"

"You're not a midget," said Seth, "you're halfway to becoming a Boheim."

"But I don't want to be a Boheim, I'm a person! How dare you do this to me!"

"There is a solution to the problem, if you wish to take it," said Seth. "But give it much thought before you decide. Being a Boheim is not so bad. It's quite good really. You would be able to use your creative abilities with complete freedom. There would be no concern for sales or food or supplies. Our supplies are unlimited and magical. Not everyone is given this opportunity, only those of outstanding talent like yourself. You would of course, look like me, which is really quite attractive, I think.

"If, however, your human form is so important to you, you have only to stop eating the leftovers we gave you and return it to us with the Fine Blanket, and your life will return to what it was. You will then never be able to return to our glen again. Too much of the magic from our food has entered your body. The moment you enter our glen you change into a Boheim. Go home now and give it much thought. This decision can only be made once. I will come to you in a few days. In the meantime, you will find the Bountiful Basket empty, as any further ingestion of its contents would take the decision from you."

Nells returned home. He was hungry from his long walk. He went to the basket, but it was empty, as Seth had said it would be. There was nothing else in the house. He sat and thought. If he were a Boheim, he would not be able to go just anyplace. He'd have to stay in the glen. That didn't really bother him too much. He preferred to be with nature. It might be nice to fly. All he really wanted to do was be able to paint. But he would be so small. And so Nells' thoughts wandered for the next few days. He was quite hungry by the time Seth arrived.

"I have brought you food," said Seth, "I did not realize you were completely without. Your decision must be based on what you truly desire and not on hunger. This is not Boheim food, and will only affect your hunger. Eat and rest. I will stay with you until your answer is ready. Please take your time."

Seth then removed himself from Nells' presence and sat on the window sill where he did not move.

The next day, Nells went through the Impossible Thicket and became a member of the Boheim tribe, where he lived a long and fulfilling life.

****

Jan Allen

THE HELPER

The threadbare cape of the peasant hung limply upon his bent and bony shoulders. Old Danforth was on his way home from market with a few pennies in his pocket. Slowly, he shuffled into the soft stillness of the forest.

Danforth's cottage was yet several more miles down the road, and he was feeling tired. He sank down beside the path and rested his weary back against a mossy stump.

In the waning light, Danforth did not notice a tiny green Elfin shoe protruding from a clump of ferns.

"I'll just rest here a moment," Danforth said, but the soothing nature of the forest began to work its magic, and he was soon fast asleep.

Trodka, a kindhearted elf, emerged from his hiding place and surveyed the sleeping human.

"Aye, it's a miserable life for some of this human lot," he said sympathetically, as he gazed at Danforth's work-worn hands and tattered clothes.

Trodka fussed about the man in tiny elfin leaps, assessing his condition. With a quick gesture of his hands, rays of greenish hue burst from Trodka's fingertips and wrapped the man's slumbering form in a subtle emerald glow.

While the healing rays worked their wizardry, Trodka concentrated his mind's eye to "see" Danforth's small cottage with its flower bed in front and field behind. The elf checked the soil condition and sensed that it was fertile, but needed a small trace element for better plant growth.

Trodka took a tiny peek into the man's destiny, saw the visit to come, and resolved to do something about it.

(continued)

"You must go down to the beach and gather sea weed for the field," Trodka whispered three times into the sleeping man's ear.

"Plant barley," Trodka again whispered three times into the man's ear. Then, Trodka withdrew, as dawn would soon be upon the forest.

When Danforth awoke, a shaft of yellow sunlight was warming his limbs, the birds were singing and he was surprised at how fit he felt.

With a whistle on his lips, and a new contentment in his heart, Danforth sauntered toward home. Although he was a poor peasant, he felt better about his life.

During supper, Danforth said to his wife, "Sarah, I believe I will go down to the beach tomorrow and gather some sea weed for the field. Perhaps it will help the soil."

So he did, and the barley was planted and it grew lush in the happy summer days.

While Danforth tended the field of barley, Sara tended her herb and flower garden. In front of their humble cottage it grew in joyful profusion.

Trodka moved into the gnarled and ancient maple beside the barley field, and kept busy popping in and out of both field and garden, tending the plants with the love only the wee ones can conjure -- and, helping as best he could to prepare for the visit which was to come.

Before long, the promise that was spring became the plentitude of fall. Danforth and Sarah bustled about the farm, harvesting the herbs and barley, which would be used to make the tea and cakes to help pass the long winter evenings.

Both Sarah and Danforth sensed the delightful magic that Trodka had woven about their cottage, and were happy.

As Sarah hung her herbs on the rafters above the stone fireplace, she marveled at their beauty and abundance. "If I didn't know better, I'd say these herbs had the kiss of an elf upon them," she chuckled.

Once, when Danforth had gone quietly to his morning tasks, he saw a floppy red hat leaping joyfully between the tall rows of ripening grain. By the time he got to that part of the field, though, Trodka, who had a bit of imp in his personality, had become only a cloud of dust and a tiny lilting laugh.

The summer had not passed so happily in the jeweler's household in the next village, however. The jeweler's daughter had become ill with a sadness for life and would not smile or take part in any diversions her distraught father planned for her.

The unhappy father had even gone to see the local sorceress for advice, but she, too, was not much help. After whis-

pering incantations for a half hour, burning a white candle, then a black one, she muttered, "Though barley cake will heal the body, I fear it can have no effect upon the illness of the spirit."

One lovely fall day, though, the jeweller resolved to try once more to cheer his direfully depressed daughter by taking her on a carriage ride through the cornucopic countryside.

Although it offered a panorama of sea and sky, the ride only made his daughter sigh.

The young girl sat resplendent in the carriage: her silks rustling in the light breeze, jewels glowing upon her neck, and tiny golden rings adorning her fingers -- but not a spark of life in her heart.

She looked at the countryside with a disinterested shrug, until the carriage passed the Danforth cottage. The very air about the home seemed permeated with happiness.

The daughter saw a smiling Sarah in her coarse cotton dress bending carefully among her herbs and flowers and her curiosity became aroused.

"Father, may we stop and see the garden?" the child asked.

"A peasant hovel," the father sniffed, but he was so happy that his daughter had shoved even a tiny interest that he agreed to stop.

Danforth and Sarah met the couple in the dooryard and welcomed them shyly. The young girl was so enthralled with the flower and herb garden that Sarah began to tell her some of the secrets she had learned from the wondrous plants.

At first the girl could not understand how these poor peasants could be so genuinely happy.

"How can you be happy without silks?" the girl asked.

"My silk is the touch of a flower upon my cheek," Sarah replied. "And the colors are more brilliant than any weaver's."

"What about jewels?" the girl asked, still persistent.

"My jewels are finer than any Queen's," Sarah said. "I have the sapphire of the sparkling sea and the emerald of the forest."

"Gold?" the girl asked.

"My gold is the ripening grain," Sarah said. "In the winter, my hunger is for grain, not gold," she added with a twinkle.

Meanwhile, the jeweler had discovered that Danforth had a surplus of barley and remembering the witch's words, he purchased some to have made into barley cakes.

By the time the jeweler and daughter departed, the girl was laughing gaily, and the jeweler was in awe of these sim-

(continued)

The Helper, continued

ple folk who had succeeded where all his gold had failed.

"How can I repay you for your goodness?" the jeweller asked.

Danforth and Sarah assured the jeweller that the satisfaction of having helped another was recompense enough.

The jeweller and daughter departed, promising to return again soon.

Trodka had witnessed the entire scene and was quite pleased as well. He surprised Danforth and Sarah by leaping upon an old oak log and singing:

"Simple joys are the best
A summer day, a sparkling sea
An elfin song, a robin's nest
A butterfly gay, a buzzing bee,

The search for self ends when we
Learn the joy of how just to be."

Sarah and Danforth were honored to see the elf's performance because it was widely known in the forest that only the pure of heart can see an elf.

Later, after the sun had set, Sarah crept quietly out to the old maple tree and left a special treat for the kind-hearted elf: a new pair of green elf shoes -- with bells on the toes.

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Len Overcash

TOY SOLDIERS

The screen door banged shut and another customer came out of Proctor's store counting his change. Russel Dean stood beside the large, dirt-caked window and watched him walk away. As the man dropped the coins into his pocket, Russel wished that one or two of them would miss the opening and fall noiselessly onto the broad gravel driveway. Or that the man had holes in his pockets as Russel did. But it did not happen.

Once again, Russel thrust his small fist into the left pocket of his worn jeans, and again the small fingers felt the slit along the botton that had allowed his savings of two weeks to slip away unnoticed and unfelt.

He cursed, using the worst word he could think of at the moment. "Darn!"

He cursed the hole in his pocket, he cursed the store for charging money for things that people needed or wanted to play with, he cursed himself for not keeping the coins in his hand, and he cursed the world for being so unfair. His plans for a wonderful, battle-filled summer were demolished, lost with the money. Now there was the whole summer ahead and nothing to fill those long, hot hours.

Russel started toward the old wooden screen door of the whitewashed, cinder-block store and almost went inside for another look at the clear plastic bag of Civil War soldiers he had been coveting for weeks. He knew exactly where they lay; on the second shelf next to the cans of soup, among the balloons and plastic model cars. He had come to know every soldier in the bag, the positions they were frozen into, and how he would place them in the dirt of the tiny yard beside his trailor home. He had even named some of them. But his money was all gone, lost, and he did not go in.

He hadn't felt this badly since the time his mother had promised to buy him a surprise gift and it turned out not to be a toy but five pairs of white cotton socks.

Suddenly he began to think about stealing them. It would be easy enough to do if old man Proctor still owned the store because he was going blind as well hard of hearing. But last month his son had taken it over and knew exactly where everything was and what might be missing, so when he called the police, he would tell them to arrest a small, blond-haired twelve-year-old boy who lived in the trailor court next to the stone quarry, and was named Dean.

Russel meandered across the broad uneven gravel driveway, kicking at large stones and rusty tin cans flattened by the cars that parked there. He did not look back at the grocery store; nor did he retrace the path the meadow and cornfield. He had spent an hour looking under rocks and reaching into clumps of tall grass seeking his money and had not found a single coin. It was as though

(continued)

J. Aschenbrenner

YOU ORT TO KNOW

I have a friendly ort
who lives beneath my bed.
he scurries amongst the fuzzballs there
in a home of lint and dirty socks.

My ort is very rarely seen,
but can be heard most every night.
He thumps and clicks,
he bumps and ticks,
he booms and bangs,
he moans and groans.

I've never really seen my ort,
but I know he's there
but I know he's there,
beneath my bed, amongst the fuzzballs there.

****

all of them had fallen into a hole in the earth and it had closed tightly over them. He wondered how it could have happened so mysteriously, so completely.

Russel walked slowly toward his trailor home without the bag of soft plastic soldiers, and without hope of ever being able to buy them soon. He wished that school were starting tomorrow, so he could skip buying lunch and start saving up all over again.

When he realized how many days away that school was, he nearly began to cry.

"It's not fair!" he sobbed aluud. "It's not fair at all!"

Then he heard the sound of a car shifting gears as it climbed the hill behind him and had an impulse to work some kind of miracle. Russel told himself hopefully, "If I reach the next telephone pole before this car passes me, I'll find my money on the table at home . . . it'll be there . . . this has just been a bad dream."

The car's engine began to fully exert itself and, just to be safe, Russel increased his strides. Though he didn't dare turn around and spoil the magic, he could feel the car closing the distance between them.

The car crested the hill.

The pole wasn't that far away, but it would be close, so Russel started running and chanting.

"On the table . . .at home . . . on the table."

He was almost to the pole when he stumbled and tumbled headlong down the grassy embankment.

The car left a thin cloud of dust and litter floating in its wake.

For a long time, Russel did not move. He wasn't injured very badly; his right foot ached, but did not swell. He just lay there in the long stiff grass under the hot June sun with the swarms of bugs and ants.

Finally, he moved and sat up, perspiration dotting his forehead along the hairline. He was thirsty, and it was time to continue homeward. Russel stood cautiously, testing his ankle, but everything was fine. He thought that to be fitting -- today his bones were invinceable, but his feelings were as fragile as glass.

"That one didn't count," he muttered. But it had counted. His magic had been beaten, and once broken, he knew, like a mirror it could never be put together right.

He climbed slowly up the embankment and continued his sorrowful walk to the trailor court where he lived. He frequently glanced over his shoulder at the crest of the hill, listening for the sound of another car, but the long, straight road was entirely empty and stayed that way for several minutes. Then the only car traveling it was going north, the other way, into Joliet.

Russel ambled along the gravel shoulder, kicking a discarded beer can until it skidded down the embankment in front of the Hubbs' house, a massive two-story brown house nestled under towering oak trees that shaded the front lawn. In the back was an apple orchard where Russel stole apples all summer. The Hubbs owned nearly a full acre immediately next to the trailor court, which they also owned.

Russel looked around the yard, but, like everything else in the world this morning, it was lifeless. Furtively glancing at the curtained windows, he started walking in the ruts of their driveway.

Mrs. Hubbs did not like the kids from the trailor court using her landscaped yard as a short-cut and would not hesitate to open the door and yell until they went back to the highway. If the warnings were ignored, she would threaten to throw them out when the monthly rent was due. But Russel went ahead anyway.

The Hubbs had a son, who, like Russel, was an only child. Jimmy was a chubby, brown-haired boy who wore black-framed, thick-lensed glasses. They were the same age, in the same grade at school, and sat beside each other, but did not get along very well. Jimmy was always wearing new, clean clothes, had many toys to play with, and never had less than two dollars in his wallet. Russel didn't even have a wallet.

This puzzled and angered Russel. Why someone as dumb and fat and creepy as Jimmy Hubbs should have all of these things, especially when he did not want most of them, and Russel couldn't afford to buy the things he truly wanted.

Just where the driveway widened and formed an easy el to the right in front of the three-car garage, next to the gnarled trunk of a massive oak, was the large sandbox where Jimmy spent hours playing. As Russel passed close by, he noticed the abundance of toys laying half-buried in the yellow sand. Shiny new metal cars, plastic dinosaurs, and green army soldiers were everywhere.

He stopped and gazed at them, wanting terribly to have just a few of the soldiers and they would fit into the special cigar box he kept hidden under his bed. Besides, Jimmy would never miss them. He had so much stuff that he couldn't possibly remember it all.

Russel looked toward the house, searching the windows for a face, but saw none. It would be easy, all he had to do was lean down quickly and scamper away. Easy!

His eyes darted nervously from the house to the sandbox, then back to the house. His heartbeat began to increase.

(continued)

Again a look toward the house. He was engulfed with a fever of energy.

He had only to bend over . . .

"Hi ya, Russ!"

Russel was so startled that he nearly fell backward into the sandbox as he whirled around.

"Wa'cha been up to?? Jimmy asked amiably. He was standing in the doorway that led to the basement.

"Nothing," Russel answered, wondering if Jimmy had done that on purpose.

"Wanna go into my basement and help me play with my new HO train set?"

Russel shrugged. He loathed Jimmy for always parading his toys and expecting everyone to be impressed and want to play with them.

"It's set up on a wooden table and has buildings and cars and tiny people. My dad got it for me because I passed with good grades." Jimmy's eyes gleamed and he gestured with his hand. "Come on."

"I seen a train set-up like that downtown at Walt's Hobby Shop," Russel said. He was wondering why Jimmy was being so nice to him, and why Billy Kliner wasn't around. They were always together, always. And when they were together, they wouldn't have the slightest thing to do with a poor boy like himself, except to taunt and torment him until he lost his temper and fled in tearful anger to his trailor, because he was too small to fight them both.

Russel kept watching the basement door for Kliner's sudden appearance. Maybe he was hiding, waiting for Russel to accept Jimmy's invitation.

"No," Russel told him.

"Aw . . .c'mon. It's real neat." Jimmy started to advance toward Russel.

Russel balled his hands into tight fists. Today he would fight them! He would call upon some unknown superhuman power and smash Jimmy's pug nose, and when Billy Kliner came charging up the basement steps, he would flip him into the grass and pounce on him, beating him to a pulp. Just like on TV.

Russel asked menacingly, "Where's Billy?"

Jimmy shrugged. "I donno."

Russel stared at the basement door, but it stayed empty.

"He's not here. Honest!" Jimmy protested.

Russel glanced across the highway at the sprawling cluster of houses called Preston Heights. Long rows of square two and three bedroom houses stood close to each other, differing only in shades of color or landscaping. Billy Kliner lived in the one directly across from the Hubbs, and the back door was open. Their car stood baking in the driveway.

"He's home. He . . . wouldn't come over today," Jimmy pleaded. "I'm not lying."

"Better not be," Russel's stance was still tense, wound tight like an old clock, but as he searched Jimmy's sorrowful face, his anger thinned, then evaporated. He was confused by the differing emotions coursing through him. One part of him wanted to play with Jimmy and his huge supply of toys, maybe even become close friends and be able to play here all summer, but the other part reminded him that it would never happen. Jimmy only wantedhim around to show off to until Billy returned, which would be soon.

A thought began to gel in Russel's mind. Billy was home, but they weren't together -- neither here or across the highway at Billy's -- which could mean only one of two things: they had an argument (impossible); or Perky was prowling about and they were afraid of being caught.

Russel grinned. This sudden discovery couldn't pass without comment.

"Perky lookin' for ya?"

"No!" Jimmy squawked, involuntarily taking a quick look behind the trailor court, at the dull silver one where Perky lived.

"Yes he is. Or you'd be playing with Billy," Russel sneered in delight. "You're scared!"

Anger boiled visibly in Jimmy's face.

"Well . . . so are you!"

"I aint," Russel taunted. "Me and Perky're friends."

But that wasn't quite true. Everyone at Laraway School was afraid of Perky, even teachers. Perky, also known as Wayne Perkins, was the oldest, biggest, and meanest kid in eighth grade. He was trouble. He ruled the playground by force and to resist was to invite disaster. Russel trembled whenever Perky shouted his name and came stomping his way. He would slump and cower like a whipped pup in Wayne's presence, answering any question, telling him any secret he knew, because he couldn't stop himself. But Russel had little to worry about. He was much too small for Wayne to bother expanding a tiny amount of energy on. He was a mere pilot fish that flitted around the great white shark.

"I bet," Jimmy answered.

"Wayne don't bother me."

They stood a few feet apart, staring. Both had something the other needed. Jimmy needed someone to show his possessions to and Russel needed to know how it felt to own things. They shared mutual feelings of loneliness and frustration. Russel knew he shouldn't be so abrasive, but the disappointment of losing his money, and the molded plastic soldiers, was overwhelming, bursting out of him. He would do nearly any-

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thing to get those soldiers, including being a buddy to Jimmy Hubbs.

Finally, Jimmy admitted it.

"I wish Perky would leave me alone," he said, remembering the last weeks of school when Perky bullied him every day. It had been a tormentingly long time, and seemed to be starting again, already. "I wish he would go away for a long, long time . . . forever. I'd give anything." He paused. "I wish he'd die!"

A galvanizing shock suddenly struck Russel, a scheme clicked to life inside his head. He had overheard a conversation between two teachers discussing Wayne, who was flunking again (at the end of the term) and warned him. So Russel felt that a favor was owed to him in return, and if Wayne could be persuaded to leave Jimmy alone for a few weeks , ... visions of Civil War battles once again danced in his head.

"What if I could fix it so that Perky would leave you alone. What would you give me?"

"You can't," Jimmy replied. "He hates me too much."

"Yes I can," Russel lied. Anything for those soldiers.

"How?" Jimmy demanded.

Russel shrugged. "I just can."

Then he had another idea, one that would surely work if this angle proved fruitless. He would threaten to tell Perky that Jimmy wished him dead! He grinned, he had Jimmy in the perfect spot.

"Why would he let you tell him what to do?"

"Okay," Russel said, starting to walk away. "If you don't want my help ."

"Wait!" Jimmy said loudly, his eyes behind the thick lenses pleading. "Why would you do that for me?"

"You said you'd give anything to be rid of Perky, didn't you?"

Jimmy hesitated, wary of what "anything" consisted of. He had lots and lots of possessions, many that he loved and never allowed anyone else to touch. He would not part with those for any reason.

"Well . . . not anything. What . . . would you want?"

Russel glanced at the sandbox. "All those soldiers , . . and a dollar."

The small fee puzzled Jimmy. He had expected Russel to ask for his train set or something equal in value. He had forgotten the soldiers that lay scattered in the sand.

"Don't got a dollar," he bargained.

"Do too!"

"Half the army men, and I pick them out."

"No dice." Russel was beginning to hate Jimmy very deeply. He could picture the beating Perky would give him and he would make sure he saw it.

"Okay," Jimmy whispered. He was trapped and just wanted to be left alone.

Perky roamed freely, his parents not caring where he went, and he often crossed the highway into the subdivision where Billy lived. Eventually, Jimmy knew, he would be caught and hurt. He was a prisoner in his own yard. He would try anything, even listen to this runt.

*

After his mother left for work, Russel sat on the wide, weathered, wooden step in front of his trailor door watching, one aisle over, where Perky and his dad worked on their car. The sky was dark and star-speckled, the temperatures perfect, but Russel wasn't enjoying it like he usually did. The deal had been made, the soldiers were stashed in the cigar box under his bed, yet, unless he came up with some convincing reasons for Perky, he would have to give them back in a few days. Jimmy promised to pay the dollar when he got his allowance.

Russel realized that he had a greater obstacle to overcome than he first thought. There was something between Perky and Jimmy that he couldn't understand, something sinister on Perky's part. Russel could see it in his eyes whenever Jimmy was near. He seemed to get satisfaction, evil satisfaction, from picking on Jimmy, and needed to do it often.

Perhaps he should forget the whole thing and not risk having Perky get mad and turn on him instead. But in all of his life, Russel had never wanted anything as badly as those Civil War soldiers.

Russel thought of the hole in his pocket and the hot lunches he had skipped at school to save the money. His stomach had growled and grumbled every day, aching dully in the late afternoon, but he had succeeded. Then, in the grass of the cow pasture behind Jimmy's house, he lost the coins . . . gone forever.

He couldn't ask his mother for the money because there was never anything left after the rent was paid and the groceries bought. A hundred things came before toy soldiers. Maybe she would bring home another nice man to stay a few days, like the tall, skinny guy last summer who gave him a dollar for no reason. He wished he had that dollar right now.

His heart was aching much more than his belly ever had.

Illuminated only by the light of the dropcord under the car, Perky and his dad looked like grease-mottled ghosts as they moved from the car to the toolbox and back in their efforts to keep the thing running. Their trailer was parallel to the edge of the Hubbs' pro-

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perty, the car sat on the concrete slab raised on a hydraulic jack.

Russel watched them working for several long minutes. Everything was going wrong. Perky had to be convinced to stop bullying Jimmy, but he had nothing to offer in return for that promise. Blackmailing Jimmy about wanting Perky dead wouldn't work either. He knew Jimmy would tell and get him in more trouble. His plan didn't seem so brilliant now.

Russel arose, walking silently on his worn sneakers, keeping himself in the shadows, but meandering in a wide circuit towards the Perkins' trailor. His wanderings ended under the canopy of budding apple trees on the Hubbs property, directly behind the trailor. Lying on his stomach in the uncut cool grass he could see them working, struggling with things Russel had never known existed, or fathom their use. It was funny to watch and listen to them. They yelled and swore at each other. Everything seemed to be going wrong and Perky was getting the blame. Just like those funny men on TV.

After a few minutes, Russel left the cover of the trailor, the drop-cord snaking out the open door. Perky and his father were completely submerged under the rusting automobile, unaware of anything except what they were wrestling with. The car was supported only by the hydraulic jack, its handle within easy reach. Russel wondered what might happen if he gave a slow twist and lowered it. Bet there would be some fast action then! They'd crawl out like a couple of scared gophers! Funny!

Of course, he would have to hide in a much better place, so they wouldn't find him and realize what he'd done. So, during the excitement, he would curl up behind the wheels where the darkness was thickest and go home through the Hubbs' and the pasture when the excitement was over.

All he had to do was stretch out a little and turn the handle like he had when he played with it once.

And the car would come down.

"Maybe, just maybe," Russel thought, "If it came down just right, it would do something to Perky. Hurt him badly enough to keep him away from Jimmy for a while, so I could keep the money and the army men."

Harold Perkins wriggled from beneath the car and told Wayne that he was going into the house to eat and that Wayne was to finish bolting something together.

Russel froze until he could hear the heavy tread through the floor of the trailor. The only noises to be heard were the ones Perky made with his wrench.

All he had to do was reach out a bit and turn and hope for the best. Just one sharp twist . . .

*

Mrs. Dean was a small, thin woman. Worn plain from long hours of waiting on tables at the Paradise Restaurant and escaping her monotonous situation in bottles of whiskey and a few sympathetic men.

"You be good tonight, huh, Russy," she said, smoothing a wrinkle in her apron.

Russel was deeply engrossed in setting up his soldiers in the tufts of weeds that passed for grass, dead to the real world.

"Did you hear me, Russy?"

"Uhnnn . . .ya."

"There's some beef stew in the ice box for you to warm up later for supper."

No answer.

"Where'd you get all those little men?" she asked, not really concerned listening for the beeping of her ride's car horn.

"From Jimmy Hubbs. He gave em to me."

"Why'd he do that?"

"I did him a favor."

The horn blared on the humid summer air.

"Well, watch yerself. I don't want what happened to the Perkins boy to happen to you." She mussed his hair lovingly. He was all she had that mattered and she felt sorry that nothing seemed to ever get better for the two of them.

"It won't ever happen to me, Mom," he said truthfully.

Then she was gone until a very long time after dark.

Russel went back to his war, deploying the soldiers around the clumps of tough grass and into the holes he had scratched in the hard-packed dirt with a bent soup spoon. He was sorry that Perky had died two days after the car had fallen on him, but that's how life was. Besides, it had completely solved his problem.

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D. Preston

THE ADVENTURES OF ROWDY RYDER

Rowdy Ryder was a cowboy bold, he travelled far and wide,
His hat was white, his saddle red, with blue stars on the sides.
Economy was his horse's name, a tired, beaten nag,
A scornful steed, she was indeed, whose middle seemed to sag.

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So Rowdy went a riding, and adventured all around,
"I've got to prove," said he with groove,
"I'm the meanest dude in town."
So ride he did along the trail, and heard a noise so weird,
That he turned around, and on the ground was an old guy with a beart.
"Who are you?" asked Rowdy. The old man leered and said,
"Crush rock and roll and mini-skirts, or I'll chop off your head!"
He wore a night black turbin and his eyes were filled with hate.
Quoth he, "My name is Allah, and I own the Golden Gate!"
"And down with Women's Lib!" he raved, while standing on his head,
"Repress their civil liberties and give them veils instead!"
And gesturing at Mecca, he said, "Now it's time to pray!"
"I like your costume, Hopalong, now run along and play!"
Rowdy muttered audibly, and started down the trail.
"The old man's nuts," he said aloud, "I can't hit that old frail."
So Rowdy rode along aways and saw the queerest sight.
A frog with a tin cup clutched in hand was standing on the right.
"Spare a nickel?" asked the frog, and to his utter glee,
Rowdy dropped into the vessel not just one, but three.
"Thank you," said the frog, and then did something rather trite.
He turned crimson color, crossed the road, and fled from sight.
"This is bizarre," said Rowdy, "but the fellow was in need."
"And I must preserve my image of a nice guy with good deeds."
So he spurred on the Economy and hastened down the road,
Ever wary on the lookout for a loaded crimson toad.
When suddenly, out of the bushes, there came a monstrous roar,
Like the buzzing of some chainsaws, maybe forty, maybe more!
And there emerged a giant carnivore, a grizzly bear by name.
Its coat was red, its claws were sharp,
And set to kill and maim.
Rowdy Ryder drew his six gun, covering the bear,
And said, "Now don't you move an inch, you just stay put right there."
Well, the bear just sort of chuckled, and he said, "Now, let
Me see, how many of your bones could I possibly break
Before you put six shots in me?"
Rowdy weighed his choices and decided with a frown.
"I am the meanest!" he proclaimed. "No bear will stare me down!"
So he aimed his six-gun carefully. (So the bear was in the way)
They Rowdy pulled the trigger and the whole world went away.

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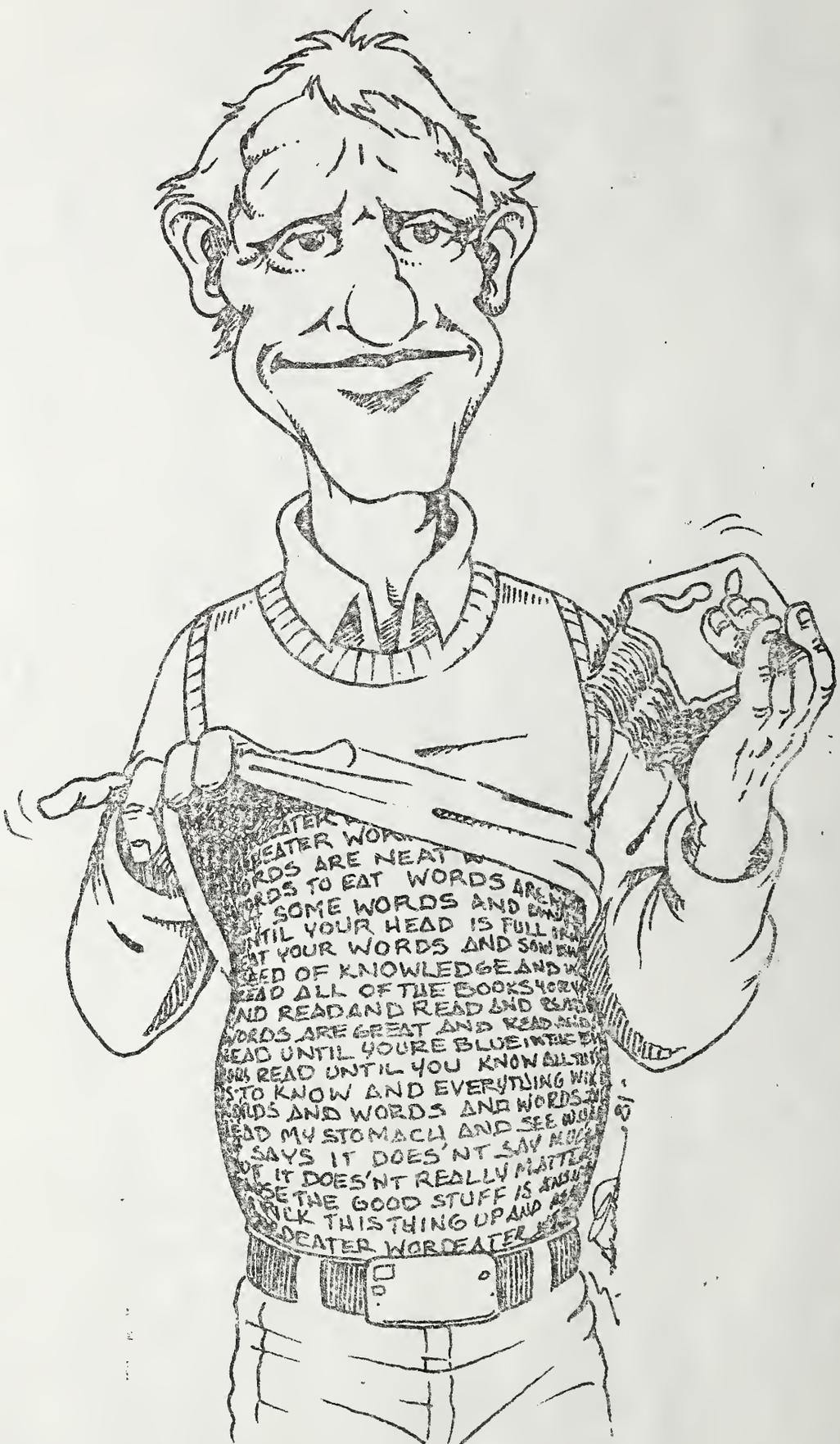
WORDS ARE NEAT
WORDS TO EAT WORDS ARE
SOME WORDS AND
UNTIL YOUR HEAD IS FULL
AT YOUR WORDS AND
EED OF KNOWLEDGE AND
READ ALL OF THE BOOKS
AND READ AND READ AND
WORDS ARE GREAT AND
READ UNTIL YOURE BLUE IN THE
READ UNTIL YOU KNOW
TO KNOW AND EVERYTHING
AND WORDS AND WORDS
READ MY STOMACH AND SEE
SAYS IT DOES'NT
IT DOES'NT REALLY MATTER
THE GOOD STUFF IS
THIS THING UP AND
EATER WORD EATER